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REVIEWS!
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VAN MORRISON
BUCK MEEK
SHABAKA
THE BEACH BOYS
+175 MORE

"WE BROKE EVERY RULE"
THE VELVET UNDERGROUND
INVENT THE FUTURE!

KIM GORDON
"I'M STILL PUNK!"

DAMON ALBARN
"DEATH, REBIRTH, REINVENTION"

HAPPY MONDAYS
"OFF OUR NUTS!"

PETER GABRIEL
FULL MOON RISING

THE TEMPTATIONS
"HEARTACHE, EGOS, HARMONIES!"

THE CLASH
UNSEEN!

CLIFTON CHENIER
KING OF ZYDECO!

PLUS!

PAT METHENY
CAROLINA CHOCOLATE DROPS
THE REPLACEMENTS
ROBERT FINLEY
THE RAINCOATS

SCAN TO LISTEN

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VELOCITY GIRL

¡SIMPATICO! (REMASTERED AND EXPANDED)

SUB POP 2LP / CD

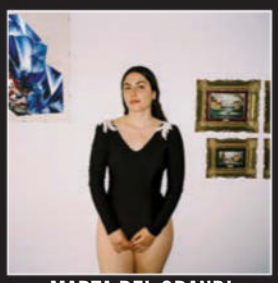
The classic 1994 sophomore album by indie-rock hitmakers Velocity Girl, remastered and back in print, with a bonus album compiling singles and rarities from the ¡Simpatico! era.

LALA LALA

HEAVEN 2

SUB POP LP / CD

The fourth album and Sub Pop debut by Lala Lala, aka Lillie West, is a punchy, warm, and hook-filled burst of indie-pop.



MARTA DEL GRANDI

DREAM LIFE

FIRE RECORDS LP / CD

A haunting introspective slice of pop magic - poetic, ironic, and deeply grounded in the present. "It serves Del Grandi well to have a musical sensibility that's so delightfully in flux" **** Uncut.

SARAH NIXEY

SEA FEVER

BLACK LEAD LP / CD

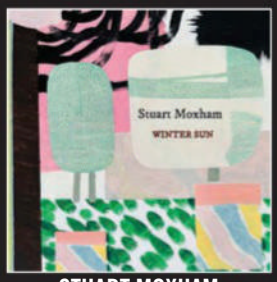
Sarah Nixey, of cult favourites Black Box Recorder, proves herself a formidable solo artist on Sea Fever, a poised and sensual fourth solo album steeped in bittersweet songcraft.

HEAVENLY

HIGHWAY TO HEAVENLY

SKEP WAX RECORDS LP / CD

Hundreds of groups have been influenced by Heavenly's brand of grrrl pop, but no-one does it quite like this. Eleven fresh, political, joyful tracks see Heavenly reclaim their indiepop crown.

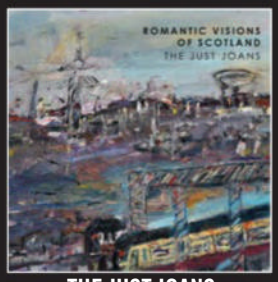


STUART MOXHAM

WINTER SUN

TINY GLOBAL PRODUCTIONS LP / CD

Young Marble Giants mastermind returns with a new solo album, talent for minimalist perfection undiminished! Hear why Lush, Hole & Galaxie 500 covered his songs! Produced by Dave Trumfio (Mekons).



THE JUST JOANS

ROMANTIC VISIONS OF SCOTLAND

FIKA RECORDINGS LP

A collection of semi-autobiographical snapshots from the Central Belt of Scotland. Characteristically melancholic, pairing indiepop with sharp observations on romantic pratfalls & everyday disappointments, all delivered with sardonic Scottish wit.

SKY VALLEY MISTRESS

LUNA MAUSOLEUM

NEW HEAVY SOUNDS LP / CD

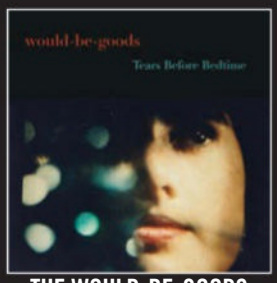
Desert rock grooves, mountainous riffs, fuzzed guitars, organs, orchestras, soulfully smoked vocals and a children's choir. Sky Valley Mistress is back with a modern classic.

JANA HORN

JANA HORN

NO QUARTER LP / CD

Written in New York and recorded in the Texas desert. Past comparisons to Yo La Tengo and Phil Elverum are still apt on "Love" and "All in bet", while spare post-punk rhythms drive "Designer" and "Don't Think."



THE WOULD-BE-GOODS

TEARS BEFORE BEDTIME

SKEP WAX RECORDS LP / CD

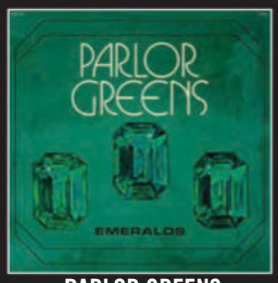
As sharp and as witty as The Would-be-goods' debut for él records, this is a collection of pop classics, with inflections of garage punk and French chanson. An impressive return.

MICHELLE DAVID & THE TRUE-TONES

SOUL WOMAN

RECORD KICKS LP / CD

Praised by Craig Charles, a powerful, inward-looking gospel-soul LP, deeply personal, fiercely uplifting, steeped in vintage R&B grit, hard grooves, and a voice forged in fire.

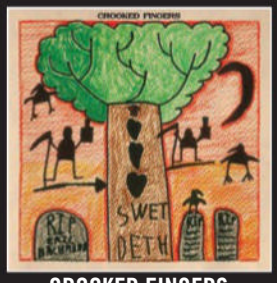


PARLOR GREENS

EMERALDS

COLEMINE RECORDS LP / CD

The sophomore long player from Parlor Greens finds the trio serving up a beautifully curated sampler of what funky organ music can be.

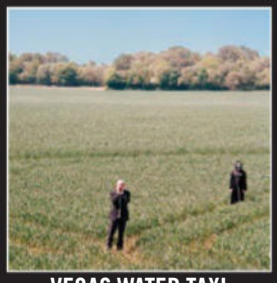


CROOKED FINGERS

SWET DETH

MERGE RECORDS LP / CD

The first Crooked Fingers (Eric Bachmann of Archers of Loaf) album for 15 years. Stacked with guest appearances from Sharon Van Etten, Matt Berninger & Mac McCaughan. Surprising & lush, a shock of colour against its morbid landscape, proof of life in the shadow of its opposite.



VEGAS WATER TAXI

LONG TIME CALLER, FIRST TIME LISTENER

PNKSLM RECORDINGS LP

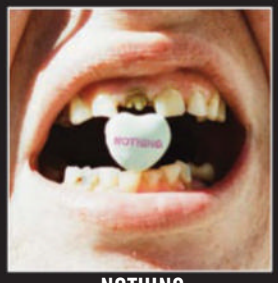
The follow-up to rising London indie/alt country combo vegas water taxi's cult favourite 2023 debut LP, showcasing leader Ben Hambro's knack for deadly funny songwriting that doesn't shy away from the all-too-real sadness at its core.

BLACKWATER HOLYLIGHT

NOT HERE NOT GONE

SUICIDE SQUEEZE LP / CD

Menacing riffs provide the bedrock for beguiling melodies; dense walls of shoegaze guitars pair with lighter-than-air synths; and siren-song vocals deliver heavy subject matter.



NOTHING

A SHORT HISTORY OF DECAY

RUN FOR COVER LP / CD

Nothing's music has always captured the full scale of the human condition. Their fifth album A Short History of Decay widens that aperture even further, providing the most hi-def rendering of Nothing to date.

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"Comes in bells, your servant, don't forsake him/Strike, dear mistress, and cure his heart"

UNCUT
THE TEMPTATIONS • MAVIS STAPLES • GINA BIRCH • PAT METHENY • GORILLAZ • RICHARD HAWLEY • ROBERT FINLEY • THE VELVET UNDERGROUND • BOB WEIR • KIM GORDON • JEFF BUCKLEY • THE CLASH • PETER GABRIEL • HAPPY MONDAYS
MARCH
2026
TAKE 349

On the cover:
The Velvet Underground by Steve Schapiro/ Corbis via Getty Images

Jeff Buckley by Paul Natkin/ Getty Images

NOT long after he filed his tribute to Bob Weir for this issue of *Uncut*, Jon Dale emailed me a YouTube link, noting "one of his finest moments was taking part in this madness..."

It wasn't, as you might think, footage of the Grateful Dead at the height of the Acid Tests phenomenon. Instead, it showed Weir jamming on a late-night '90s TV show with Bongwater and Screamin' Jay Hawkins, playing a suitably chaotic version of Roky Erickson's "You Don't Love Me Yet". Here, it implied, was Weir linking the Grateful Dead's '60s acid rock to both its roots and its experimental heirs. It also reminded us of the qualities that made Weir and the Dead so distinctive.

"Our whole approach dawned on us relatively slowly," Weir told John Robinson in 2020. "It became apparent that we were up to something a little different than most musical ensembles were trying to achieve. We took a lot of direction early on from the John Coltrane Quartet and Miles Davis... which relied heavily on improvisation but also on listening closely to each other and working off what the other band members were saying."

You can read John's interview in full – the majority of it previously unpublished – and Jon's tribute in our celebration of Weir's remarkable life and legacy beginning on page 56.

What else? A lot, of course. Take a trip Downtown circa 1966 as Tom Pinnock uncovers some eye-opening revelations about The Velvet Underground via a bunch of new interviews. You'll also find Tom's story illustrated with a number of previously unseen photos of the band from the Billy Name archives.

There's more – including Kim Gordon, Damon Albarn, Jeff Buckley, Shabaka, Peter Gabriel, Happy Mondays, Pat Metheny, Robert Finley and The Clash. But I'll leave you with Iron & Wine's Sam Beam, who offers some wisdom to Fiona Shepherd on page 27: "I'm always trying to shake things up in one way or another, and experimenting with genre is a fun one."

It's a spirit that echoes the adventurous, improvisational ethos that made Weir and the Dead so singular.

Until next month...

Michael Bonner, Editor
Follow me on Bluesky @michaelbonner.bsky.social

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INSTANT KARMA!

THIS MONTH'S REVELATIONS FROM THE WORLD OF UNCUT

WITH... Slim Dunlap | The Clash | Julianna Barwick & Mary Lattimore

"I have been thinking about the future..."

Peter Gabriel readies another batch of new songs, to be released on full moons throughout 2026

The Big Room: Gabriel and his band at Real World Studios in Wiltshire

WHILE Neil Young has historically been rock's premier selenophile, Peter Gabriel has contested his crown in recent years. The tracks for 2023's *i/o* – Gabriel's first album of new music since 2002's *Up* – were released individually at each full moon, a strategy he is now deploying with its follow-up, *o\i*.

"The songs are a mix of thoughts and feelings," he explained as he debuted Tchad Blake's Dark-Side mix of "Been Undone" on January 3's Wolf Moon (Mark "Spike" Stent's Bright-Side mix is to follow). "I have been thinking about the future and how we might respond to it. We are sliding into a period of transition like no other, most likely triggered in three waves: AI, quantum computing and the brain-computer interface. Artists have a role to look into the mists and, when they catch sight of something, to hold up a mirror.

"We are not, and have never been, the exclusively self-determining, independent beings that have been given the run of the world. We are something else, a part of nature, a part of everything, and feeling a connection, shaking our booty and giving and receiving some love can help us find our place – and put a big smile on our faces."

Gabriel described these two complementary projects as "my lumpy bits – *i/o*: the inside has a new way out and *o\i*: the outside has a new way in... Some of these songs are going to form part of the brain project that I've been exploring for a number of years, and some just make me feel happy."

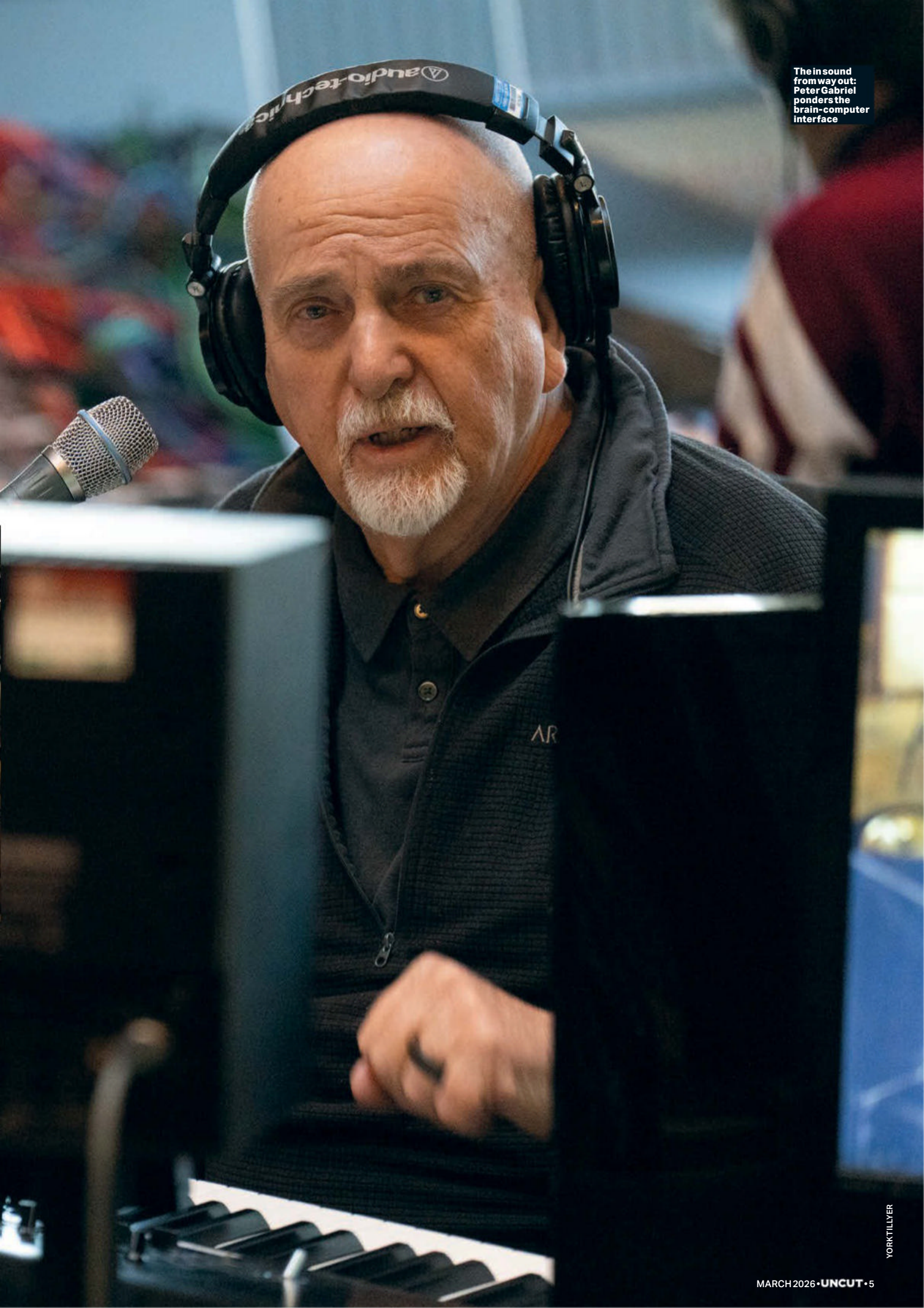
But it isn't only new music on Gabriel's mind. After helping to mark the 50th anniversary of Genesis's *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* last year, he is now pivoting to his own back catalogue. In March, he releases *In The Big Room* – the recording of an intimate 2003 fan-club concert – and in May there's *Live At WOMAD 1982*, where he debuted material from the upcoming *Peter Gabriel 4*. "Like most artists, I was buzzing on the latest thing, so you want to play it," Gabriel told *Uncut* in 2023. "It probably wasn't the smartest commercial move... but it felt energising!"

Expect another new track from *o\i* to be released on February 1's Snow Moon.

MICHAEL BONNER

(From left) Tony Levin, Gabriel, Manu Katché and David Rhodes at Real World

YORK TILLYER



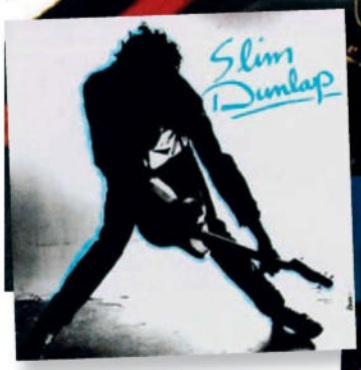
The in sound from way out: Peter Gabriel ponders the brain-computer interface

YORK TILLYER

Don't tell a soul

Even as a member of The Replacements, guitarist Slim Dunlap flew under the radar. A new solo reissue highlights his unique talents

"There was never any bravado": Slim in his home studio in Minneapolis



"He was one of the deepest and truest rock'n'roll souls I've ever heard" BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

"SLIM'S whole sound was mysterious," says Tommy Stinson of guitarist Bob 'Slim' Dunlap, his former bandmate in The Replacements. "You'd see him playing and wonder, 'Where is that coming from?' He'd mess with electronics and make his own effects pedals. He was like the old genius uncle, with all kinds of stuff going on. I always loved that about Slim."

Fifteen years Stinson's senior, Dunlap was a key figure in Minneapolis's emergent independent scene of the late '70s. Local entrepreneur Peter Jesperson (who would later sign and manage The Replacements) was inspired to start the Twin/Tone label in 1977 as an outlet for R&B combo Thumbs Up, featuring Dunlap and powerhouse soul shouter Curtiss A. The duo then transitioned into the punky Spooks.

By the time Paul Westerberg asked him to join The Replacements in early '87 to replace Stinson's half-brother Bob, Dunlap was already a Twin Cities cult legend. "We used to run into him a lot playing the clubs, whether it was the Longhorn or First Avenue or whatever," Stinson recalls. "Everyone knew Slim, he was such a sweetheart. He was a very subdued fellow, in a way. But after spending time in The Replacements, I think we brought out another side of him. Paul in particular was really pushing him to rise above what he was used to, to make a little more racket. It was like, 'You're a lead guitar player, man. Get out there!'"

Dunlap is a vital presence on 1989's *Don't Tell A Soul*, providing counter-melodies and decorative texture to Westerberg's open-tuned guitar. He also made telling contributions to the following year's low-key *All Shook Down*, though The Replacements were over by '91. Dunlap subsequently went solo, signing to Jesperson's Medium Cool imprint for 1993's *The Old New Me* and *Times Like This* (1996), despite being a somewhat reluctant frontman. Among his biggest fans was Bruce Springsteen, who told E Street Radio in 2024: "He was really a unique guitarist, singer and songwriter, and one of the deepest and truest rock'n'roll souls I've ever heard."

Dunlap continued to play around Minneapolis until 2012, when he suffered a severe stroke that left him paralysed. Westerberg and Stinson quickly established Songs For Slim, a project that raised money for his medical expenses by commissioning a series of Dunlap covers by artists including Peter Buck, Jeff Tweedy, Lucinda Williams, The Jayhawks, Steve Earle and Patterson Hood (eventually compiled on *Songs For Slim: Rockin' Here Tonight*).

"Slim was in The Replacements when I first saw them in 1987 – he was great, even those times when [the band] weren't," remembers Hood, who covered "Hate This Town" for the project. "That song just spoke to me in a really personal way. I'd written many songs about my hometown, often from a somewhat surly point of view of feeling stuck there. 'Hate This Town' had such a cool twist and was full of such lovely sentiment without being sentimental. I wish I'd written it."

The Replacements' own "Songs For Slim" tribute EP in 2013 led to a full-on band reunion that lasted for a couple of years. "It brought us back together for someone other than ourselves, which I think was a great moment," says Stinson. "I revere that as being a really good Replacements record. We were able to just throw caution to the wind and be the 'Mats again for a minute."

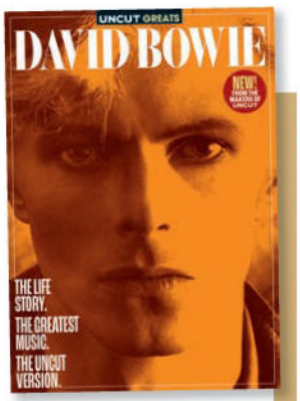
Dunlap passed away in December 2024, but his two mid-'90s solo albums are now being compiled on *Every Little Word*, a 2CD package that also includes bonus tracks, demos and live recordings.

"Some people want to get out there and be a star, like: 'Yeah, here I am!'" Stinson concludes. "Slim wasn't that guy. Within the Minneapolis music scene, he's so important from top to bottom, but there was never any bravado about it. Slim was more like, 'Here's what I do. If you like it, come listen.' I always got the feeling that he *meant* to fly under the radar." **ROB HUGHES**

Every Little Word is released by Curation Records on February 26

The Replacements in Minneapolis, MN, January 26, 1989: (l–r) Slim Dunlap, Tommy Stinson, Paul Westerberg and Chris Mars

DAVE BILJAN; PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES



A Quick One

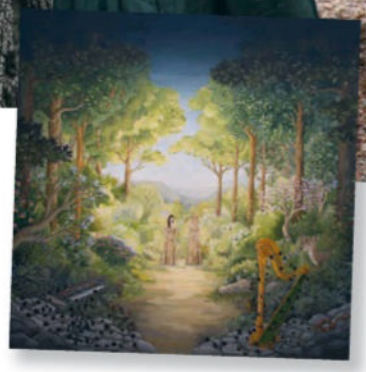
Watch that man! **David Bowie** is the inaugural subject of our new **Uncut Greats** series, which will tell the life story of *Uncut*'s pantheon of artists via excellent new writing, ranked reviews and classic features. The Bowie edition is in shops now or available to order direct from us at *shop.kelsey.co.uk/uncut*...

Take it on faith, take it to the heart: the 148-page Deluxe Edition of our **Ultimate Music Guide** to **Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers** is out on February 13. There's also an updated version of **Ultimate Record Collection: Curated By Sleaford Mods** due on February 20. You know where the shop is, don't ya?...

Club Uncut is back! After putting on early UK shows by the likes of The War On Drugs, Phosphorescent and Joan As Police Woman in the late '00s, we're returning to bring the best live music to London, starting with **The Delines** *(above)* and **Chris Eckman** at the Union Chapel on March 26. Both artists will be signing records afterwards...

In our recent **Ultimate Music Guide** to **Bruce Springsteen**, we neglected to mention that the cover image was shot by the excellent Jo Lopez. See more of his work at *jolopezphotography.com*...

Julianna Barwick and Mary Lattimore: sonic respite from ICE and fire



Magic in the air

Ambient alchemists Julianna Barwick and Mary Lattimore on an inspiring sojourn à Paris

JULIANNA Barwick is renowned for her layered, wordless chorales that seem to inhabit their own ethereal realm. Yet "Melted Moon" – the final track on *Tragic Magic*, her new collaboration with friend and fellow traveller Mary Lattimore – is heartbreakingly specific. "*A blaze like a volcano*", she sings, describing 2025's LA wildfires as they approached her home. "*A strange taste in my mouth/You may never go home again/At least not the home you know*".

"I could smell the smoke when I woke up," Barwick tells *Uncut*. "The only thing that even comes close was when I was in New York on 9/11. I remember seeing ashes and pages of books [in the air], and when we were driving out of the neighbourhood it was opaque grey, streetlights off. I can still feel it viscerally, it was really scary." Lattimore was similarly affected: "It reminded me of that helplessness we felt during Covid. Things are being wiped out right and left, everything we've known before is being taken away by a force that we don't understand at all."

Both these adopted Angelenos grew up in Southern religious households, and share a sense of the musically sacred. "I no longer go to church," Lattimore says, "but I'm inspired by nature and the feeling of something more profound than we are out there, walking into a space that is heavy with ghosts, and mysterious." She could be describing Paris's Musée de la Musique, where the duo were invited just two weeks after the wildfires to craft an album using the museum's collection of ancient instruments. "It was like a womb," says Lattimore. "We were cooking something there in sometimes windowless basement rooms, so we couldn't tell what time it was."

> **"Audiences of both our music often say it's like a balm"**
> **JULIANNA BARWICK**

Barwick selected a series of vintage analogue synths, while Lattimore picked out centuries-old harps. "I played a song that Roger Eno wrote for us, 'Temple Of The Winds', on this harp from 1740," she says. "It rang out loud, and the strings are really close together. It doesn't sound like a modern harp at all, and it's cool to hear it in a modern context."

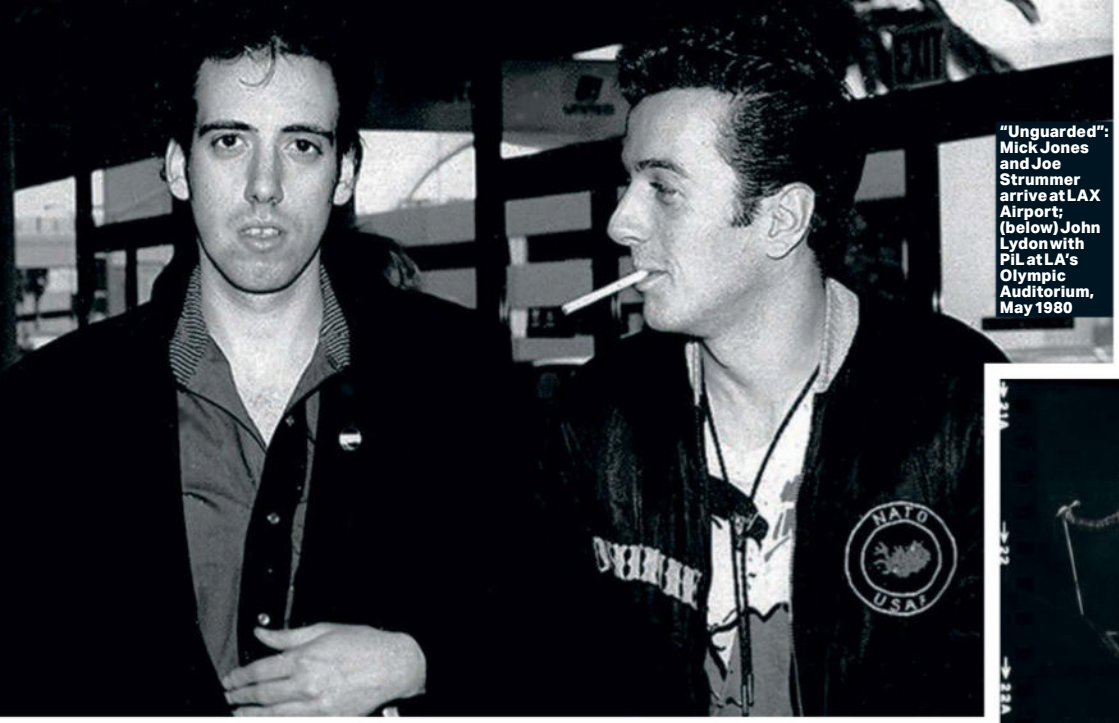
Ancient instruments, modern sensibilities and the inferno's aftermath combine most clearly on "Rachel's Song", originally from Vangelis's *Blade Runner* soundtrack, where brooding synths and mournful vocals follow the eerie sound of rain. "Our friend Rachel texted to say, 'It's raining for the first time in eight months in LA,' and we asked her to go out and record it," Lattimore explains. "We wanted the sound of the first rain after the fires on the record."

Returning to LA after their "once in a lifetime" Paris sojourn, they found communities rallying together, and an enduring disquiet. "Feeling unsafe and in a state of anxiety is a constant for the last six years," Lattimore reflects. "Covid led to lots of depression, the fires are depressing, ICE in our city is depressing," Barwick adds. Playing *Tragic Magic* live has provided solace. "Singing 'Melted Moon' on stage is cathartic, and hopefully it will be for someone who's lived through that or something similar. Audiences of both our music often say it's like a balm, and calming."

For Lattimore, though, performing this music live is a fiercer thing. "I don't feel calmness when I'm playing with you, Julianna," she decides, "I feel like my brain is turned on. It's transporting me to a different world." **NICK HASTED**

***Tragic Magic* is out now on InFiné; Julianna Barwick and Mary Lattimore play London's EartH on April 11**

RACHAEL CASSELLS; JASON QUIGLEY



"Unguarded": Mick Jones and Joe Strummer arrive at LAX Airport; (below) John Lydon with PiL at LA's Olympic Auditorium, May 1980

LA Calling

The photographs of Spike Waltzer reveal how touring UK bands fired up the Los Angeles punk scene

Hi Spike! Where and when did you first encounter The Clash, and how did it affect your photography and outlook? I first heard *Give 'Em Enough Rope* in 1978. My neighbour Don Snowden, a music writer for the *LA Weekly*, gave it to me in our Hollywood apartment building. It made an immediate impression – and then after listening to their first LP, I realised that authority was always to be questioned and that has always stuck with me. At the time I was working as a paparazzo – hotels, award shows, celebrities. It paid well enough, but I didn't get much out of it. The Clash felt different: urgent, direct, and believable. I wanted to be closer to that world. The camera was how I did it.

What was the LA punk scene like in the late '70s? Unsettled, energetic and very DIY. LA was spread out, so the scene wasn't centred in one place. Clubs like the Starwood, the Whisky, the Roxy, Madame Wong's all mattered. People drove long distances for shows. There was no MTV, no national radio equivalent to the BBC, and no John Peel. If you wanted new music, you had to go and find it. The scene wasn't punk in a narrowly British sense. It included art students, surfers, outsiders, freaks, queer kids and people with nowhere else to go. You could see very different bands on consecutive nights. Nobody had money, but there was a lot of intent.

How influential were touring British bands on the LA scene? Very influential, though often indirectly. Most arrived with major label backing, so they already had status. Seeing them live showed local bands what was possible – in sound, attitude, and scale. The Clash carried particular weight. Their first US shows mattered. If they'd failed, it could have slowed the momentum of the LA scene. 2 Tone bands like Madness and The Specials also had a strong impact, although without the UK context it was shorter-lived. Even so, it fed into later American punk and ska.

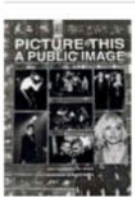
What were some of the craziest things you witnessed at shows? Crowds were physical. People climbed onstage, knocked equipment over, and security was often unprepared. PiL at the Olympic Auditorium was strange – the venue was used to boxing and wrestling, not punk. The Germs at Flipper's roller rink was chaotic and barely held together. What stayed with me more, though, was watching bands develop quickly. The Go-Go's changed noticeably within months. Unknown bands played small rooms with complete commitment. You could sense things forming, even if no-one was thinking in those terms at the time.

Tell us about the lead-up to The Clash's first US shows in 1979... By early 1979, expectations were high. The records were out, the singles were already well known, and the local press was focused on their arrival. There was excitement, but also a sense that it mattered. They were controlled, intense, and convincing. The show they played at the Roxy [in April 1980] was the best gig I've ever been to – the energy was phenomenal.

How did you end up gatecrashing an official Clash photoshoot? A friend blagged an interview by saying he was from the *NME*. I came along and started photographing while another photographer was setting up. It wasn't deliberate – it just happened. The photographer wasn't pleased, but it didn't escalate.

And the LAX photos – how did those come about? I checked which flights they were arriving on from previous tour dates and went to the airport. I was fortunate with the timing. They'd just landed and were unaccompanied, and they stopped to pose for me. The photographs reflect that – straightforward, unguarded moments.

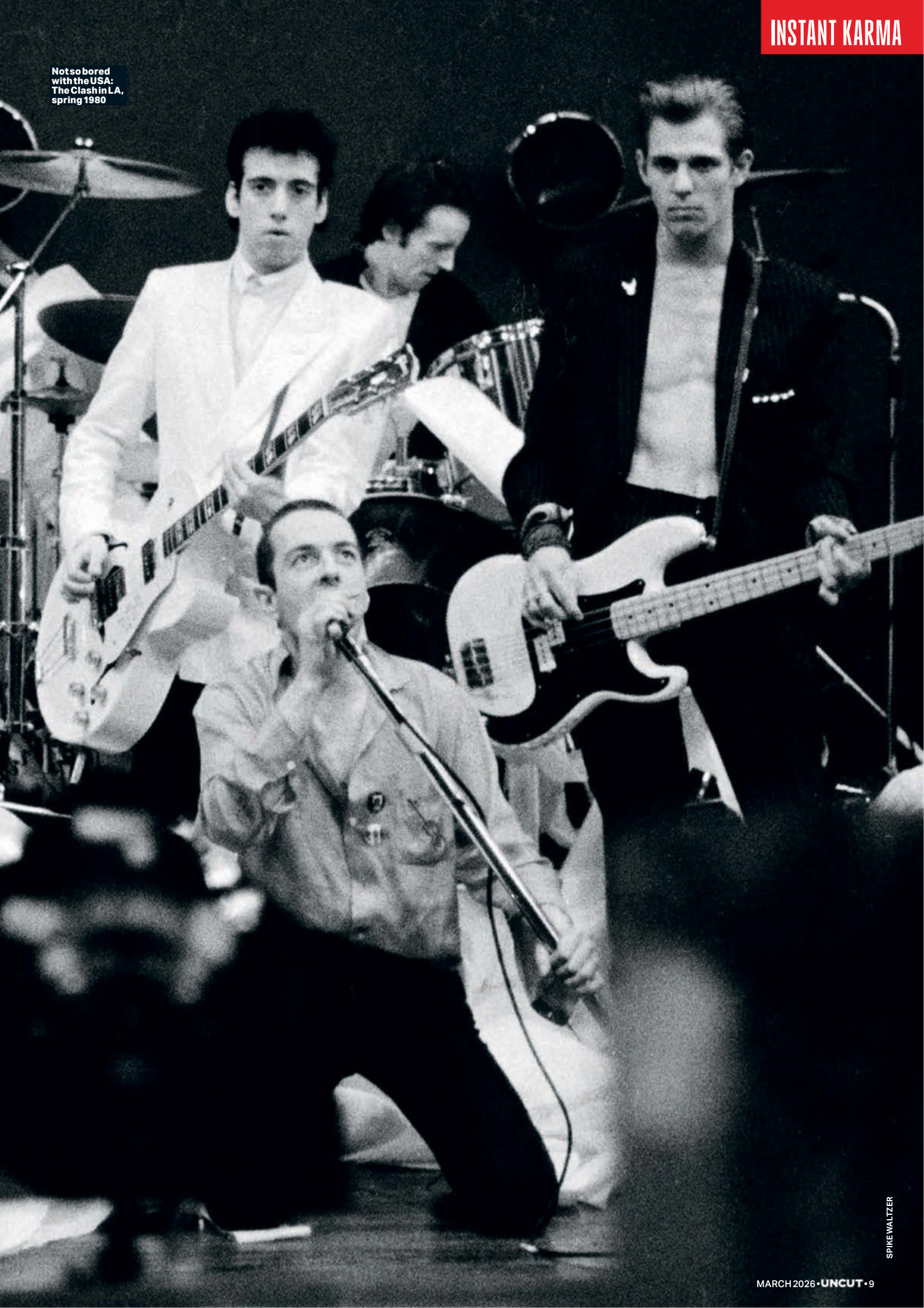
Did you get to meet or spend time with the band? No. I wasn't looking to socialise. I saw them working, and they were consistently focused. They understood what the shows meant to the audience and took that seriously. They lived up to the expectations. ***SAM RICHARDS***



Picture This: A Public Image is at Camden Open Air Gallery, London (Feb 27 – March 11), New Century, Manchester (March 23 – April 5) and Gallery 40, Brighton (May 12–16); the accompanying hardback book is available from *spikewaltzer.com*, Rough Trade or Resident Music

SPIKE WALTZER

Developing quickly: The Go-Gos at the Whisky A Go Go, July 1980



Not so bored with the USA: The Clash in LA, spring 1980

SPIKE WALTZER

House of Holland: LA six-piece Dutch Interior

WE'RE NEW HERE

Dutch Interior

Country? Slowcore? Piano pop? This multifarious LA sextet can do it all

"I'VE always wanted to be the person that says, 'When the six of us get in a room, magic happens,'" admits Dutch Interior bassist Davis Stewart. And now he can. But that's where the truisms end for this Los Angeles sextet, who come at the listener from unexpected musical angles, fusing slacker indie, fragile balladry and country-rock across their three albums to date. "It keeps things from getting boring," reasons singer-guitarist Jack Nugent. "Why would you want to play the same genre all the time? I feel we could write anything and this band could handle it."

Their natural eclecticism and enviably harmonious dynamic were forged from a Venn diagram of friendship connections and previous bands that spans decades. Stewart has known brothers Hayden and Shane Barton (drums and keys respectively) all his life. Conner Reeves and Noah Kurtz, who both sing and play guitar, bonded over classic rock in elementary school. Nugent is the new boy, but even that association goes back more than a decade.

When their last incarnation, Skin Mag, ran aground at the start of the pandemic, they regrouped informally to share and make music with no agenda. Their supportive show-and-tell sessions quickly yielded a mini-album, *Kindergarten*, of languorous, lo-fi indie folk introspection with delicate experimental edges.

"The first record wasn't even meant to be a record," says Nugent. "We were just recording whatever songs we had to hand on our living-room floor, getting drunk and fooling around with the tape machine. That set the tone for our whole process, just having eight tracks and not being afraid to make mistakes in the recordings. It's all grown from that."

After a brace of house shows, they recorded a more "intentional" follow-up album, *Blinded By Fame*, and found a wider audience when Fat Possum Records picked up their third album, *Moneyball*, last year. "The main change was a headspace one: 'We're a band now and we're making a record and people are going to listen to it,'" says Reeves.

Dutch Interior draw from a deep well of musical talent. Every member writes (though not all have proffered their wares yet), leading Reeves to hail "the boy-band facet" of having a coterie of singers and no specific frontman. "We end up liking each other's songs more than our own, so that's a healthy balance," he says.

"It allows you to be a fan of your own band," adds Nugent. "And there's a lot that can be learned about your own song when you give it to other people and get their perspective on it."

"We're all so close that we're fine with hearing our idea is bad," says Stewart, to general assent.

The sheer diversity of their sound is showcased on forthcoming EP "It's Glass", which takes in the soothing country lope of "Ground Scores" (imagine Pavement's "Range Life" with added pedal steel swoon), the whimsical throwback piano pop of "Go Fuck Yourself" and the sighing slowcore instrumental "Say Anything", a blend of balm and distortion.

Until now, the group have cleaved to their Long Beach and South LA 'hoods, but they headed north to San Francisco to record the EP in Hyde Street Studios, which has hosted numerous Bay Area legends down the years, from Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead to Dead Kennedys and Green Day. "It wasn't intimidating, because our friend is an engineer there," says Stewart, "so we got to relax and enjoy this iconic space. I like fucking up a bass take where Jerry Garcia recorded, you know what I mean?"

FIONA SHEPHERD

"It's Glass" is released by Fat Possum on March 6

I'M YOUR FAN

"There's a quality of love and surrender to their music that feels like the frequency of life" Trevor Powers (Youth Lagoon)

KYLE BERGER; TYLER T. WILLIAMS

Uncut Playlist

On the stereo this month...

BONNIE 'PRINCE' BILLY
We Are Together Again
DOMINO
If *The Purple Bird* was the Nashville album, this is very much the Louisville album – a warm, intimate gathering of friends and family: *"The bathtub needs draining/But I'm not complaining..."*

AL GREEN
"I Found A Reason" FAT POSSUM
Yes, as in the Velvet Underground song! Perfectly timed for our cover story, the Reverend turns Lou's wispy doo-wop tribute into a string-drenched Memphis soul showstopper.

TINARIWEN
Hoggar WEDGE
A poignant rallying of the Tuareg rock tribe, with members of Imarhan, Terakaft and Tamikrest all involved. But there's still room for guests from Sudan (Sulafa Elyas) and Sweden (José González).

ANDREW WASYLYK
Irreparable Parables
CLAY PIPE MUSIC/STATE 51
Wintry and wondrous chamber-pop fantasias, elevated by a smattering of simpático vocalists including Gruff Rhys, Kathryn Joseph and Stuart Murdoch of Belle & Sebastian.

THE BLACK CROWES
"Profane Prophecy" SILVER ARROW
A gleeful return to first principles for the Robinson brothers, by which we mean "Profane Prophecy" sounds like three different Stones riffs pounded together and blasted into next week.

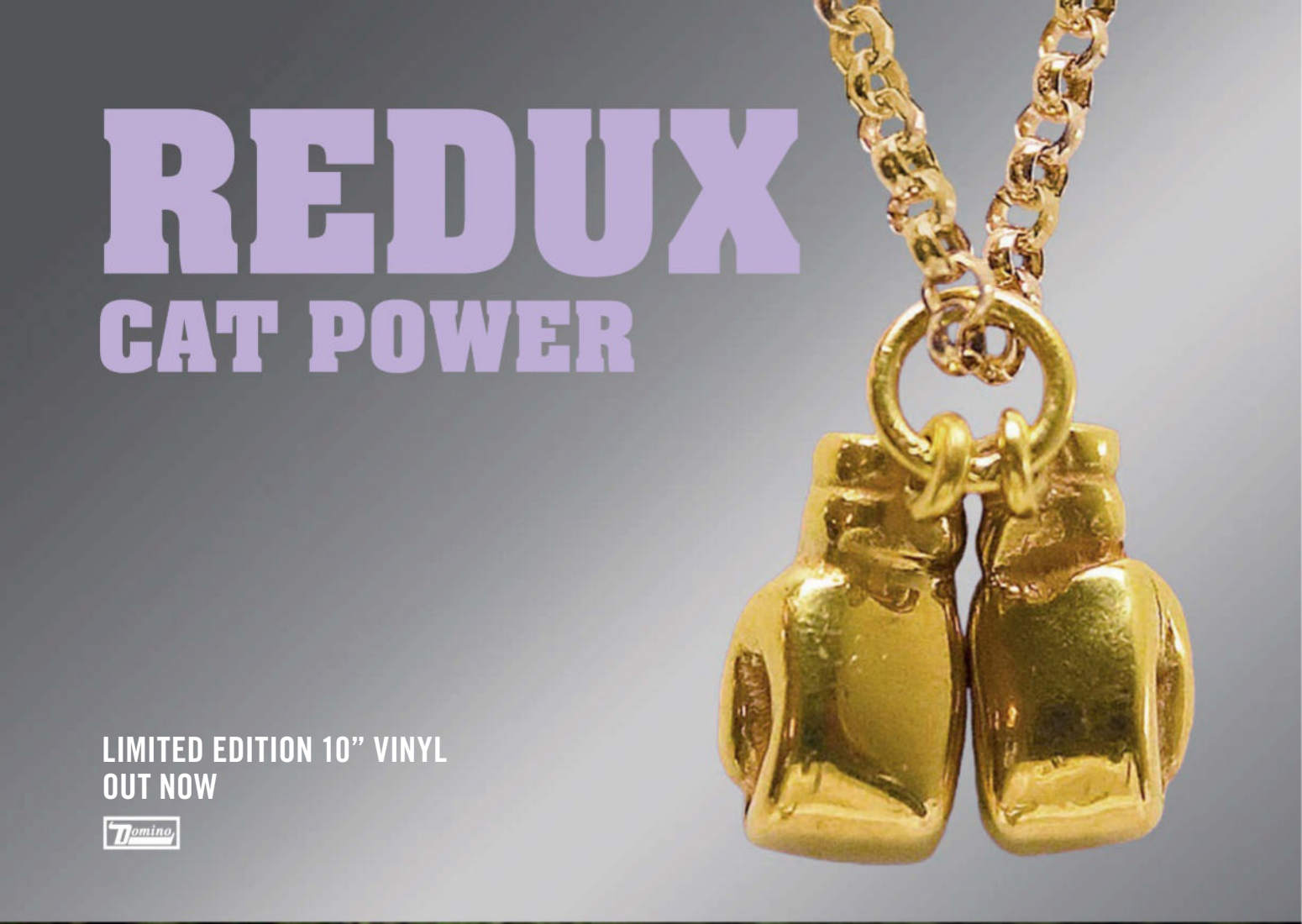
STINE JANVIN & MORTEN JOH
Or Gare: Funeral Procession Music From Ryfylke, Norway
KRETS/FUTURA RESISTENZA
The bygone custom of *liksong* (literally "corpse song") reanimated amid dolorous electronics, augmented by the guitar of Jules Reidy and the cello of Lucy Railton.

WU LYF
"Tib St Tabernacle" LYF
"In these dark times/Can you still hear your heart sing?" Resurrected Manc-rock mystics give it the full Bad Seeds on this reassuringly epic 11-minute single, produced by Sonic Boom.

ALEXIS TAYLOR
Paris In The Spring
NIGHT TIME STORIES
Scritti's Green Gartside and Air's Nicolas Godin add their sophisti-pop flair to this big-hearted solo effort from the Hot Chip frontman. Nice electro-dub cover of "Wild Horses", too.

CHARLOTTE CORNFIELD
Hurts Like Hell MERGE
Sixth album – and first since motherhood – from the Canadian singer-songwriter, slotting in nicely alongside the shaggy confessionals of Waxahatchee, MJ Lenderman, et al.

STEPHEN O'MALLEY
Spheres Collapser
XKATEDRAL/LA BECQUE EDITIONS
As a kind of amuse-bouche for the new Sunn O))) album, here's a typically time-dissolving blast of euphoric doom from the grand pipe organ of Église Saint-François, Lausanne.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Domino Soundtracks

Run Run Run

15 tracks of the month's best new music

The Delines

1 THE STUDIO 68! WITH DANI TURNER
Funky People

This month we kick off with a raging rock'n'roll cut from the reformed Studio 68!, early-'90s mod revivalists, and Devon singer Dani Turner. There's a definite air of Betty Davis to Turner's raw vocals, and a marvellous Funkadelic-go-freakbeat vibe to the music from this revived group.

2 THE DELINES
The Meter Keeps Ticking

Willy Vlautin's Portland band return with *The Set Up*, their most cinematic, loosest album yet. It could almost be a soundtrack to one of Vlautin's novels, perhaps the new *The Left And The Lucky*, with a varied mix of spoken word, delicate instrumentals and soulful songs such as this standout.

JASON QUIGLEY

8 CARDINALS
I Like You

Cork five-piece Cardinals mix emotional, wracked rock with accordion and maudlin folk, shards of distortion regularly bursting through the half-light. Their album *Masquerade* is a fine debut, with a little Bright Eyes, a bit of The Pogues and a touch of Fontaines DC.

9 CROOKED FINGERS
Haunted feat. Sharon Van Etten

Eric Bachmann is back with *Swet Deth*, his latest record as Crooked Fingers. A melting pot of new wave synths and electronics, "Haunted" is lifted by the ethereal voice of Sharon Van Etten. Elsewhere, the album features Matt Berninger and Mac McCaughan.

10 KMRU
With Trees Where We Can See

Nairobi-born, Berlin-based Joseph Kamaru was born into music: his grandfather, whose name he shares, was a seminal Kikuyu songwriter and performer. Kamaru Jr has taken a different route, though, and now Editions Mego release the engrossing *Kin*, a slow-moving mix of ambient drone and transfigured electronics.

Hen Ogledd

Bill Callahan

Marielle V Jakobsons

3 ALTIN GÜN
Öldürme Beni

Garip is the first LP to be released by these Amsterdam-based Anatolian explorers after the departure of co-vocalist Merve Daşdemir. Here, pressing excitedly on, the remaining members have crafted a fantastic set of Turkish psych in tribute to "folk bard" Neşet Ertaş.

4 BILL CALLAHAN
Stepping Out For Air

Callahan has been releasing music for almost 40 years now, and his new album *My Days Of 58* suggests that, if anything, he's going from strength to strength. This seven-and-a-half-minute masterpiece combines folk strumming with jazzy horns, and builds to an anthemic climax as Callahan calls for Gabriel to "*come blow your horn*".

5 MARIELLE V JAKOBSONS
Everything Lost Remains

The Patterns Lost To Air is the first solo album in a decade from the Oakland-based composer. Stripping things down to violin, Moog and Fender Rhodes piano, Jakobsons explores the natural world and the passing of time in these celestial, beatific instrumentals.

6 ULRIKA SPACEK
Picto

There must still be something in the water in the Thames Valley, as Reading's Ulrika Spacek continue their modern-day exploration of blown-out shoegaze and avant-rock. This is a highlight of their fourth album, *Expo*, and perfectly demonstrates the band's smart mix of Radiohead, Slowdive and Swirlies.

7 IRON & WINE
In Your Ocean

Sam Beam returns with *Hen's Teeth*, a follow-up to 2024's *Last Verse*, written and recorded at the same time. Rather than a collection of outtakes, though, this might be the stronger effort, whether he's channelling tropicália or – as here – swinging, Big Thief-esque folk-rock. Head to page 27 for a long review.

HANLY BANKS CALLAHAN; JANALBET; GERMAINE VANDERSANDEN

11 HEN OGLEDD
Clara

Dawn Bothwell, Rhodri Davies, Richard Dawson and Sally Pilkington's new album *Discombobulated* is one of the most maximalist and gloriously strange records since, well, Hen Ogledd's last album, 2020's *Free Humans*. "Clara" evokes The Incredible String Band, while also taking in the Welsh language, free jazz and gloopy electronics.

12 THE WAVE PICTURES
The House Painted Blue

Now on the Bella Union label, David Tattersall's literate trio have added another fine album to their discography. As "The House Painted Blue" shows, *Gained/Lost* ranges from Dylan-esque wordplay and highlife canter to Americana gravitas and fiery garage rock.

13 BUCK MEEK
Ring Of Fire

The Mirror, the latest solo album from Big Thief guitarist Meek, is a fitting companion to his other band's *Double Infinity* LP. Recorded at his own log-cabin studio, the album includes a host of guests, and manages to combine studio experimentation with heartfelt, playful folk songs. See page 32 for an in-depth review.

14 CLÉMENTINE MARCH
Lucie

A singer-songwriter born in France and now living in London, via a long stay in Brazil, March is the latest in a long and welcome line of musicians channelling the post-punk exotica of Stereolab, the collaged genius of Broadcast and the off-kilter sway of Cate Le Bon. This compact gem features on her new album *Powder Keg*.

15 ISABEL PINE
Fables

Anything signed to Kranky is worth a listen, and so it goes with British Columbia's Isabel Pine. Recorded inside and outside a remote cabin in the Canadian wilds, her debut album *Fables* presents a new and very promising voice in modern classical atmospherics.

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Metheny: have guitar, will travel

JIMMY KATZ

"The in-between stuff is what I was interested in"

AN AUDIENCE WITH...

PAT METHENY

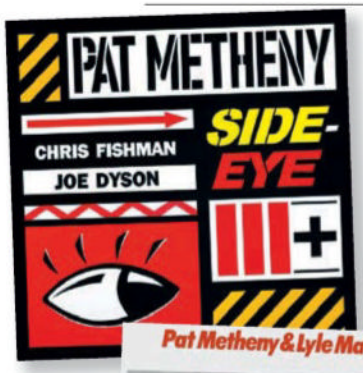
The jazz guitar virtuoso on playing with Bowie, Joni, Herbie and a robot band: "What story do we want to tell today?"

Interview by SAM RICHARDS

FOR a guitarist who has bagged 20 Grammy awards in a staggering 10 different categories, it's perhaps not surprising to discover that Pat Metheny is largely baffled by the concept of genre. "It's always been kind of mysterious to me," he confesses down the line from upstate New York. "What is rock? What is pop? What is jazz? If I think of the spectrum of all the sounds that human beings could possibly make, it is interesting to me how it's so tightly clustered around a very tiny part of that spectrum that has to do with somebody playing the root on one, somebody smacking the crap out of two, maybe something on three, and then somebody smacking the crap out of four. It all seemed more about the dress code than the music... and I don't get that, man. I've never gotten that."

Luckily, his ongoing Side-Eye project seems to have attracted a cadre of young(er) musicians who intuitively understand Metheny's radiant fusions of jazz with whatever else comes to hand. "At this point, I've reached the stage where pretty much everybody's young relative to me!" he laughs. "We're in new territory now, where probably more than half the people that have been on records with me are no longer on the planet."

Still, it must be great to know that the next generations are so informed and enthused. "Absolutely. When I first started being a bandleader, it was very difficult for me to explain exactly what the thing is. All this in-between stuff, that's what I was interested in, and it took me a really long time to explain that to people, especially drummers. But now, man, there's probably 10 drummers I could hire that could just walk right in and play those tunes, and that is a cool thing."



When did you first know that you wanted to be a musician?
Annette Mayer, Wilmslow

My family's musical. My dad was an excellent trumpet player. My older brother Mike could, at 12 or 13, play a Purcell trumpet concerto. But as far as my own thing goes, I can't remember when I didn't have this radio station blasting into my brain from outer space. Maybe I recognised when I was five or six that these were not things that I had heard, they were new things. It took me a long time to understand that there's just this constant thing that I hear all the time of, like, really hip stuff. And my goal in life has been to try to render at least a piece of what that stuff is.

'Falls' guys: with Lyle Mays, backstage at Ravinia, Highland Park, Illinois, 1981

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

Are there any trends that occur in your songwriting process? Do you have somewhere you find yourself physically that inspires you?
Jesse Kupper, via email

It doesn't work like that for me at all. I wish it did! I know there are musicians who can see a beautiful sunset in a beautiful location: "And now I shall go to my chamber and I will compose!" It's not like that for me. I hear a note and then I imagine, "OK, maybe that should be the next note." And once I'm in that realm, it could be anywhere, it could be nowhere, but it's completely separate from the physical reality. So I've written music in all different kinds of places. I don't even remember most of them. It's more about the *thing* than the place or the time or even where I was at personally in my life.

I have a real soft spot for "As Falls Wichita, So Falls Wichita Falls". I'd like to ask you how you and Lyle [Mays] came about making that track.
Richard Skinner, via email

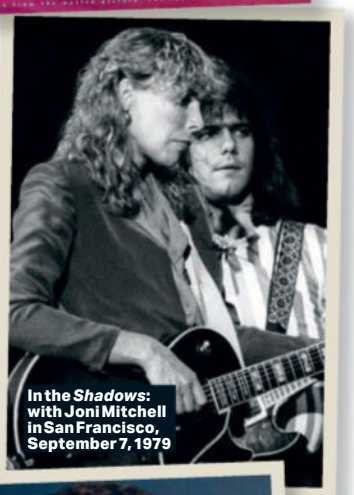
It was a transition period for me. By that time [late 1980], I was leaning into synths a lot. It was an interesting period for tech at that moment – suddenly we had polyphonic instruments! At the same time, I recognised that to be able to really utilise those instruments effectively, they had to be balanced with some kind of earth element. So when I met [percussionist] Naná Vasconcelos, that really set up this palette of potential. We had to change planes in London to get to the recording in Oslo, and the baggage guys were on strike. We had these synths with us, so Lyle and I went down and physically took the stuff off one plane and put it on the other. Can you imagine that now?

Could you tell us about your tour with Joni [Mitchell], captured on her *Shadows And Light* album?
Kurt Patberg, Lancaster, Pennsylvania

You know, that was... interesting. The notable thing about that for me was, ➤➤

Metheny machine music: in Coutances, France, during The Orchestrion Tour, January 2010

Bowie, 1985: "The most amazing human being"



In the *Shadows*: with Joni Mitchell in San Francisco, September 7, 1979

Miles Davis, 1980: "I got your record here!"

"Watching Bowie do his vocal was like seeing Sonny Rollins or something. He was the real deal"

I was able to really help [saxophonist] Mike Brecker during that tour, which led to he and I doing the record *80/81*, which led to him getting cleaned up. So the most important part of that period for me was helping Mike. I've played with a lot of singers over the years – Milton Nascimento, Bowie, those guys are really famous. But if I think about the musicians I've been around in my life, I played a lot with Charlie Haden, with Herbie [Hancock], with Gary Burton – that's the reality for me of what musicianship is. And whether somebody's famous or not really doesn't figure into it that much.

What was it like working with David Bowie in the '80s?
Marc Hughes, via email

That was cool. I gotta say, I've been around some exceptional people in my life, many of whom are probably completely unknown to the vast majority of the public, but that guy was one of the most amazing human beings, and I think we all agree about this. He was so smart, man. Watching him do his vocal on that track ["This Is Not America"] was like seeing Sonny Rollins or something. He was the real deal.

For your Orchestrion project, you created an entire robot band. How did they compare to human musicians?
Frank Littleton, Purley

First of all, had there been any remaining doubt about just how weird I actually am, that project put it to rest once and for all. I've always been really curious about what's possible in music. Everybody's walking around with screens and speakers in their pocket, but I wanted to use the front end of 21st-century tech to give an acoustic result. [It meant] I could improvise pieces from the ground up using the various robotic instruments. And in that sense, it's very similar to looping, which is an interesting way of making music. To me, none of these things are mutually exclusive to anything else. They're just different possibilities, different ways of thinking. They're all hopefully in service of our mission, which is: what story do we want to tell today, and what's the best way to do that?

You have had warm musical and personal relationships with several Miles Davis alumni, but how was your relationship with the man himself?
Martin Bamford, Nottingham

There's two things for me that are in a category of their own: Miles and The Beatles. I did a bunch of gigs over the years where it was my band and Miles, but I studiously tried to stay away, because I didn't really want to know the guy, even though all reports are that he was really cool and everything. But one time he walked by me and was like, "Metheny! I got your record here..." And then there was a chance I could have done something with Paul [McCartney], a stupid film thing that came up, but I was like, 'I wanna keep that the way it is.'

What is your favourite Hendrix song and guitar solo?
Ozren Dadic, via email

I missed [Hendrix] at the time because I would have been about 15 or 16, and I was playing in Kansas City with lots of guys who were like, "You just gotta listen to Sonny Rollins, man!" I did hear *Are You Experienced* and I was like, "Well, this cat, at least he can really play the blues." I liked it, but I was just in a different place at that time. So it took me a couple years, and then I got it. I *more* than got it. Everything on those first two records, it's just the greatest. The guy was incredible. In some ways, his thing was transcendent of guitar, even. It's a little like Trane for me: the guy was probably the greatest saxophone player ever, but that's about the fourth thing you would talk about with him. That's not really what it's about, and I think it's the same way with Hendrix.

Who is your dream collaborator that you're yet to work with?
Peter Fors, Stockholm

Man, I don't think there is one. I've played with all of my dream people. There are a few that I had the chance to do and I didn't, and I regret it. Joe Henderson is the biggest one. Another one is Elvin Jones. But, man, I played a lot with Herbie, I played with Chick [Corea], Gary Burton... There's lots of talented musicians, but I don't care about that as much as somebody who's really got something to tell you. I wanna be able to smell their mom's cooking. Brad [Mehldau] was like that for me when I first heard him, and I would like to do more with Brad. What's good about music is that after we get done talking, I'm gonna go work on something in the key of B flat. That was B flat a million years ago, it's gonna be B flat a million years from now, too. So I feel very lucky to be able to hang in that realm.

Side-Eye III+ **is released by Uniquity Music on February 27; Pat Metheny plays London's Barbican Hall on July 18 and 19**

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THE UNCUT GUIDE TO THIS MONTH'S KEY RELEASES

GORILLAZ

The Mountain

KONG

Damon's gap year in India: death has never sounded so joyous. *By John Lewis*

ALBUM OF THE MONTH 9/10

IN TV they talk of the "anthology series": a regular, recurring show, like *The Twilight Zone*, *Tales Of The Unexpected*, *Inside No 9* or *Black Mirror*, where each episode has a different setting, cast and sometimes director, unified only by a small team of writers or showrunners. In a similar vein, you could see certain 21st-century outfits – Sault, UNKLE, Handsome Boy Modelling School, Mr Jukes – as "anthology groups": modular ensembles with a shifting cast of guest musicians and vocalists, changing from song to song.

Gorillaz are, of course, the anthology group *ne plus ultra*. Just two threads hold the project together. One is the punky, cartoonish artwork of Jamie Hewlett; the other is the anything-goes sonic adventurism of Damon Albarn – always singing, in this context, through effects, as if he's making an emergency phone call from the wreckage of some digital shanty town.

Over the last decade, however, things had broken down between Hewlett and Albarn, and there seemed something a little formulaic about the last few Gorillaz albums: they served up some decent slices of global pop with some marquee names, but without much synergy between the artwork and the music, and no grand concepts of the kind that united 2010's *Plastic Beach*.

After 2023's *Cracker Island*, Albarn suggested that Gorillaz were in need of "a paradigm shift", and their ninth studio album provides that. Instead of a series of discrete, bite-sized TV shows, *The Mountain* is an epic, banquet-sized movie. It retains the musical universe familiar from previous Gorillaz albums – American singers, Latino rappers, English pop eccentrics, African and Middle Eastern multi-instrumentalists – but the setting here shifts to India. A recurring cast of Hindustani classical musicians provide much of the background, while the lyrics are inspired by Hindu notions of Samsara and the life cycle, dominated by themes of death and rebirth.

Part of the reason why Albarn and Hewlett are once again tight and simpático is because they were united by grief after a triptych of deaths: Hewlett's mother-in-law's death in 2023 was followed by his father's death in 2024, just 10 days after Albarn lost his own father. Albarn senior, incidentally, had a life that was almost as interesting as his son's: an inspirational art course leader, whose students included Adam Ant, Malcolm McLaren, Peter Greenaway and Ian Dury, he briefly managed Soft Machine and curated dozens of art exhibitions and "happenings" around Swinging London. Like many 1960s

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counterculturalists, he also had a long-term obsession with Indian music and culture, which feeds into this album. Several tracks even serve as eulogies for him. *"Your legacy frightens me"*, we hear on "Orange County", while "The Sweet Prince" seems to narrate Keith Albarn's last moments. *"Sweet prince, don't be sad/You were never meant to be here"*, Damon sings over Anoushka Shankar's tumbling sitar flourishes and Johnny Marr's jangling guitar. Here the syringe that administers palliative painkilling injections becomes a sword which *"will set you on your patterned path into the next life"*.

In keeping with the spirit of death and resurrection, Albarn has also mined his archive to find unused vocal snippets from now-deceased Gorillaz guest singers. In this world, death is not the end: Bobby Womack's soulful croon and Dave Jolicoeur's abstract couplets are reanimated for "The Moon Cave"; Mark E Smith's glorious gibberish about *"peg-legged slave traders"* and *"shrunken China heads"* serves as the chorus to "Delirium"; Tony Allen intoning *"we are ready"* in Yoruba introduces "The Hardest Thing"; while Dennis Hopper's distinctive raspy tone provides the name of the LP. Proof, a rapper from Eminem's Detroit collective D12, was shot dead in 2006, but his contribution to "The Manifesto", recorded 25 years ago, sees him almost narrating his own murder. *"Beefing with your blocks/That you're creeping with your Glock/Now you're sleeping in a box"*, he declaims, over a woozy, Dilla-style waltz and some drunken funereal horns.

Even the newly recorded guest vocalists concentrate on themes of mortality. Sharing bars with Proof on "The Manifesto" is the 23-year-old Argentine rapper Trueno – he's rapping in Spanish but his verse, translated in the sleevenotes, is an astonishingly poetic invocation of the life cycle (*"I crossed the threshold and today I feel free... only my feats, my virtue and my feeling accompany me/To live chapter two of this tale"*). Gruff Rhys ends "The Shadowy Light" with the lines *"I shed my skin/The end is the beginning"*; Black Thought from The Roots sprays out several verbose rhymes throughout, ruminating on the final track that: *"Even if they let me into Heaven I would probably just move back soon"*.

But the sonic signature of *The Mountain* remains the core group of classical Indian musicians – sitar virtuoso Anoushka Shankar, bansuri flautist Ajay Prasanna, tabla player Viraj Acharya and sarod-playing brothers Amaan Ali Bangash and Ayaan Ali Bangash – as well the nine-piece Mountain Choir. Even the most English-sounding track here – the drunken, clanking, Jerry Dammers-inspired ska of "The God Of Lying", featuring a deadpan vocal by Joe Talbot from Idles – comes wreathed in tablas and bansuri flute, like a Bollywood take on "Clint Eastwood" from the first Gorillaz album. The ecstatic Arabic blip-hop of "Damascus" sees Syrian singer Omar Souleyman and Yasiin Bey (the artist formerly known as Mos Def) trading verses over the pulsating percussion of Viraj Acharya. "The Manifesto" started off with a simple Latin preset on one of Albarn's vintage home organs and it would have worked perfectly if set to a dembow-style reggaeton beat, but it piles on so many Indian rhythms that it morphs – quite brilliantly – into a piece of heavy bhangra. And the pulsating synth pop of "The Shadowy Light" is transformed by Bollywood legend Asha Bhosle, now aged 92, with a lyric that sees her welcoming the process of death (*"come, oh boatman, lower my boat into still waters/And take me, finally, to the other side"*, she trills, in Hindi).

Just as this threatens to look like gap-year fetishisation of brown spirituality, the Kraftwerkian "The Plastic Guru" serves as a welcome rejoinder – an account of Albarn and Hewlett's Beatles-like visit to an ashram in Rishikesh, where they quickly grew suspicious of their assigned swami (*"starring in your own show and selling your snake oil"*). Bleepy analogue synths and a jabbering four-to-the-bar piano are slowly drenched in multi-tracked sitars and the massed ranks of an Indian ceremonial band, as if to desperately assert the guru's credentials. False idols also dominate the infectiously catchy "The Happy Dictator", where Ron and Russell Mael from Sparks invoke the spirit of insane autocrats, like Kim Il-sung, whose rule is eternal, even after their death.

Albarn has, of course, explored grief on many occasions – Gorillaz's "Andromeda", Blur's "The Ballad" and the title track to his solo album *The Nearer The Fountain...* are all mournful elegies to departed friends and loved ones; countless other Blur and Gorillaz songs mourn the death of relationships. You would expect an entire album with death at its central theme to be similarly hymnal, sombre and funereal, but *The Mountain* somehow manages to be none of these things. Its 15 tracks are filled with cheery major-key singalongs, sitar-soaked synth-pop bangers and whimsical waltzes that serve as ecstatic celebrations of life, rebirth and reinvention.

SLEEVE NOTES

Produced by: Damon Albarn, Remi Kabaka Jr, James Ford and Samuel Egglenton

Recorded at: Studio 13, London; Studio 13, Devon; Kintsugi Studio, Delhi; Island City Studios, Mumbai; Studio 5020, Miami; Criteria, Miami; Amber Fort, Rajasthan; The Ghats, Varanasi; places in Rishikesh, Damascus, Syria, New York

Personnel includes: Damon Albarn (vocals, guitars, keyboards, percussion, harmonica), Dennis Hopper, Asha Puthli, Bobby Womack, Dave Jolicoeur, Jalen Ngonda, Black Thought, Ron and Russell Mael from Sparks, Tony Allen, Bizarapp, Kara Jackson, Trueno, Proof, Joe Talbot, Omar Souleyman, Yasiin Bey, Mark E Smith, Asha Bhosle, Gruff Rhys, Vlad (vocals), Johnny Marr (electric guitars), Ajay Prasanna (flute, bansuri, tabla), Anoushka Shankar (sitar), Amaan Ali Bangash, Ayaan Ali Bangash (sarod), Viraj Acharya, Bharat Singh (percussion, tabla), Izzi Dunn (cello), Kotono Sato, Sarah Tuke (violins), Ciara Ismail (viola), Olivia Jageurs (harp), Chris Storr (trumpet), Matthew Gunner (French horn), Santiago Alvarado (keyboards), The Mountain Choir, Rebecca Freckleton, Jesse Appiah, Paul Simonon (backing vocals)

RECOMMENDER

SIMIAN SOUNDS

The road to *The Mountain*

MONKEY
Journey To The West
XL, 2008
The soundtrack that accompanied Albarn and Hewlett's epic collaboration with the Chinese opera director Chen Shi-Zheng was the first time Gorillaz immersed themselves in Asian culture, mixing up arcade game electronica, Chinese orchestral music and field recordings made around five visits to Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. **6/10**

GORILLAZ
Plastic Beach
PARLOPHONE/VIRGIN, 2010
The last fully developed concept album by Gorillaz, set on a futuristic dystopia in the Pacific trash vortex, featured many of the same names as *The Mountain* (Bobby Womack, Gruff Rhys, De La Soul, Mark E Smith, etc), but takes us through bashment, grime, bossa nova and New Orleans marching bands. **9/10**

DAMON ALBARN
The Nearer The Fountain, More Pure The Stream Flows
TRANSGRESSIVE, 2021
Albarn's most introspective and beautiful album, recorded largely during lockdown, was apparently inspired by the spectacular landscape seen from a house he built in Iceland, but its mix of home-recorded keyboards, vintage drum machines and chamber orchestrations seems to embody a drizzly English melancholy. **8/10**

Q&A

Damon Albarn on India, John & Yoko and Mark E Smith

Gorillaz in their midst: Jamie Hewlett and Damon Albarn

How did you end up in India?
This is Jamie's story to tell, really, but his wife Emma's mother had a horrific accident in India, and Jamie went out there to help get her back to France, where she later died. But, despite that horrific experience, Jamie found India a magical place. And when he said he was going back, I said, "I'll come with you." I've always wanted to go there and it allowed me and Jamie to spend some important time together.

Did you and Jamie fall out?
After *Plastic Beach*, we didn't split up, but we really fell out. It's only recently that we've managed to repair things. And, in India, we got really very close again, as close as we were when we shared a flat together in west London 25 years ago. We were expressing the same emotions, both going through the same mourning process. And we both felt that the Indian way of dealing with death – rebirth, reinvention – was healthy.

You spread your father's ashes in the Ganges – was that his dying wish?
No, he never discussed his death with me. I just thought it would be a lovely thing to take a small part of his ashes to Varanasi. Part of what I got from my dad was a sense of the divine. He was always fascinated with India and Indian culture. He used to play me Indian music as a kid all the time. In his last few weeks, when he was on his last legs, we played him a morning raga, and he miraculously seemed to come out of the coma that he was in, and was weirdly lucid for half an hour.

Is it true that he introduced John and Yoko?
He helped put on the art exhibition where John Lennon met Yoko Ono. That is part of our family mythology. I once found myself in Chinawhite with Julian Lennon, having a long chat, just two of us in a darkened room, and I told him that story. And he looked at me and went, "Hmmm. Thanks." That was it. Haha!

Where did you meet Asha Bhosle?
I recorded Asha in her house in Mumbai, in a room with [legendary Bollywood film composer] RD Burman's old harmonium, which I played. I couldn't believe she was up for even meeting, let alone recording. What an extraordinary force of nature that woman is. Everywhere we went in India seemed to be full of life and noise and music. I loved the studios in Mumbai: phenomenal musicians going in and out all the time, all with an incredible workrate.

You obviously had a huge back catalogue of unused recordings from people you've worked with who have now died...
It was great to find stuff from Mark E Smith that we hadn't used – his mad rants about *"china heads and the slave master"*, it's just wild. The only person I couldn't believe we had nothing left on tape was Terry [Hall]. There was always banter in the studio, he was very chatty, but the engineer at the time must have been super-efficient, so we only kept the bits we used. I've now vowed to never get rid of anything!

How autobiographical are the lyrics here?
I'd say this is the most emotional album I've ever made, certainly as Gorillaz. The lyric about being a chastened man on "The Empty Dream Machine", I do mean that. I do endeavour to keep improving as a human being, because that seems to be the only option. I really have been chastened in recent years – by relationship breakdown, divorce, death, politics. And, of course, the dark satanic mills of global politics, that all oozes out of the floorboards on this record.

This is a very multilingual LP: how much do you understand?
Bits. My German and French are pretty good. I speak a bit of Spanish. That comes through my daughter Missy, who is fluent in Spanish and has spent time in Buenos Aires, and got me into Trueno and Bizzarap, the Argentinians on this album. But you often don't need to understand every word to connect emotionally. That's why I find lyrics so difficult. Much of the time, I want to keep the lyrics I improvise on the original demos, because they've got the right emotion. On the first Gorillaz record, my lyrics were almost all gobbledygook. I sometimes have difficulty articulating my emotions. But I've tried to do it on this album, as honestly as I could.

What other projects are you working on?
I'm currently working on the score to Luca Guadagnino's film, *Artificial*, about Sam Altman. I'm singing some songs and writing some electronic and orchestral backing.

Do you still carry your home studio around with you?
Yes, always. I don't have a mobile phone, but I do have an iPad with GarageBand. When everyone else is scrolling, I'm sitting there putting a hi-hat on a song. What's the person sitting next to me playing Sudoku got at the end of his puzzle? After an hour, I've got a tune!

What would you say to accusations of "cultural appropriation"?
I don't see it as appropriating anything. I'm just learning how to speak a few words of a different language. I'm just really interested and enthralled and fascinated by any nuance in a culture that I don't understand. And I want to learn it and project it forward, project it back. I want to see its reflection, I want to taste its flavours. I want to be enveloped by it. And if that's appropriation, well, that's me. If you're genuinely interested and respectful: great. What else is there, apart from learning more? I was brought up in the East End of London in the 1970s, in a terraced house, with a Jamaican family on one side and a Pakistani family next door. I'm hardwired to be interested in all cultures, to get into conversations and friendships with different people.

Gorillaz are playing some huge venues this year – how will you approach them?
I like the idea of recreating a record from beginning to end. But I'd also like to do a selection of music which changes on a nightly basis, a different show every night. I mean, I'm hoping to get all the key vocalists on this album – we'll have Black Thought there, but I'm sure he won't be able to do every night, and that's true of all the guests. For the departed singers, luckily, we've always filmed everybody in the studio, so we can play around with that. It'd be nice to conjure up some very powerful holograms everywhere...

INTERVIEW: JOHN LEWIS

"I do endeavour to keep improving as a human being" DAMON ALBARN

Reflective mood: Van Morrison enters his ninth decade

BRADLEY QUINN

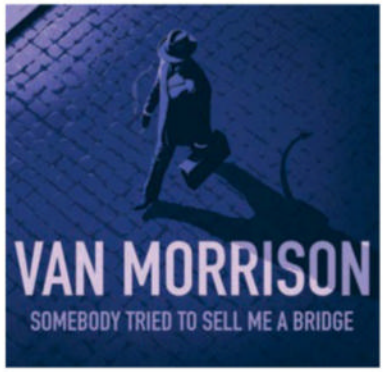
VAN MORRISON

Somebody Tried To Sell Me A Bridge ORANGEFIELD

8/10

At 80, Van turns back once more to the music that raised him.

By Richard Williams



As they enter their ninth decades, it's not surprising that some of those musicians who grew up learning the foreign language of the blues should feel like returning to the source of all they became. Dylan nodded to that urge with "Goodbye Jimmy Reed". The Stones went all out with *Blue & Lonesome*. Now Van Morrison, never reluctant to acknowledge his debt, gives us an 80-minute, 20-song set largely made up of material from artists he was listening

to and learning from in his Belfast teens.

Future historians will marvel at the earnest diligence with which, in the British Isles, a generation took to singing about mojos and king bees and hoochie coochie men, achieving enough authenticity to convince their young audiences as they assumed the roles of men working in Mississippi cotton fields or visiting whorehouses in New Orleans, a place they had yet to visit anywhere but in their imaginations. Musicologists will have no difficulty in identifying Morrison among the handful who used their acquired authenticity as a platform from which to reach into new dimensions of self-expression.

Them's version of "Baby Please Don't Go", spat out in a London studio by the 19-year-old George Ivan Morrison one day in 1964, almost 30 years after Big Joe Williams first recorded it, is arguably the most convincing British blues record of all, supercharged by the sense that already Morrison was using the force of his character to find something beyond mere emulation. He'd heard John Lee Hooker's 1949 version of the song and sensed extra layers of mystery waiting to be explored.

So Van's 48th studio album is a voyage of rediscovery through terrain whose appeal remains undimmed by time and familiarity. He treats the blues with the respect it deserves, but he aims to have fun along the way, while proving that, at 80, he still has the voice – albeit an octave or so lower than in his early days – to make the material live again.

Van's 48th album is a voyage of rediscovery

Without being billed as such, the set is programmed like a show, albeit a very informal one, better suited to a club than a hall. Working in a studio in Sausalito, the northern California town where he recorded *Into The Music* in 1979, he's accompanied by a very solid basic rhythm section (including his longtime bassist David Hayes) and a handful of backing singers, to whom illustrious guests are added as the songs roll by. The guitarists Elvin Bishop and Buddy Guy drop in, Taj Mahal contributes harmonica, banjo and vocals. Everybody is swimming in comfortable waters; the turnarounds and endings are part of the common language, endearing in their predictability.

Nor is the sound gussied up by technology. It's almost as though these tracks are recorded in a rehearsal room rather than a studio, the musicians themselves working out a balance while playing together rather than relying on an engineer at a mixing desk. It would be a surprise if anything took more than a couple of takes.

Van begins with a pair of songs, the mildly saucy "Kidney Stew Blues" and "King For A Day Blues", from the repertoire of Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, the Texan blues shouter who also played the alto saxophone in a style somewhere between early R&B and Charlie Parker. In tribute, Morrison hooks up his own alto; he's no Vinson, but the passionate gawkiness of his delivery fits the mood he's summoning.

There's a crisp "Snatch It Back And Hold It", from Junior Wells' classic *Hoodoo Man Blues* album, while Bishop makes his first appearance to add stinging licks to Hooker's "Deep Blue Sea". Fats Domino's "Ain't That A Shame" loses its New Orleans shuffle, replaced by a soulful ballad tempo that allows Morrison to own the song.

And so it continues through the covers, including a pair of murder ballads, the traditional "Betty And Dupree" and Blind Blake's plaintive "Delia's Gone", on which Taj Mahal again steps forward, alternating verses with Morrison on the former, blowing lusty harp on both and then sticking around for Lead Belly's "On A Monday", written from inside a prison cell. Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee's jaunty "When It's Love Time" and the gospel singer Marie Adams' "Play The Honky Tonks" maintain the roadhouse mood, and Bishop is at his best on two slow blues ballads, "Madame Butterfly Blues", written by Van's compatriot Dave Lewis (once of psych heroes Andwella's Dream), and "You're The One (That I Adore)", from the repertoire of Bobby Bland.

Buddy Guy, now in his 90th year, emerges for the double-whammy finale, a slugfest of Muddy Waters' rousing "I'm Ready" and BB King's "Rock Me Baby", on which Van's vocal elaborations – stutters, growls and shouts – show how he used the enigmatic simplicity of the blues as a teaching aid to finding and shaping his own voice. What those lessons inspired is made clear on the slow-rolling "Loving Memories", one of the set's four Morrison originals.

On the title track, another original, he coolly proclaims his unwillingness to fall for other people's tricks. And over the bustling Latin rhythm of "Social Climbing Scene", he sings: "*He's a Belfast boy and he knows just where he's from/Don't want no fol-de-rol, don't want no lah-di-dah*". Be assured there's none of that here.

SLEEVE NOTES

1 Kidney Stew Blues
2 King For A Day Blues
3 Snatch It Back And Hold It
4 Deep Blue Sea
5 Ain't That A Shame
6 Madame Butterfly Blues
7 Can't Help Myself
8 Betty And Dupree
9 Delia's Gone
10 On A Monday
11 Monte Carlo Blues
12 When It's Love Time
13 Loving Memories
14 Play The Honky Tonks
15 (Go To The) High Place In Your Mind
16 Social Climbing Scene
17 Somebody Tried To Sell Me A Bridge
18 You're The One
19 I'm Ready
20 Rock Me Baby

Produced by: Van Morrison
Recorded at: Studio D, Sausalito, California
Personnel: Van Morrison (vocals, alto saxophone, guitars, harmonica), Taj Mahal (vocals, banjo, harmonica), Buddy Guy (vocals, guitar), John Allair, Mitch Woods (keyboards), Elvin Bishop, Anthony Paule (guitar), David Hayes (bass), Larry Vann, Tom Hambridge (drums), Bobby Ruggiero (percussion), Ben McAuley (tambourine), Dana Masters, Jolene O'Hara, Larry Batiste, Nona Brown, Omega Rae Brooks, Crawford Bell (backing vocals)

AtoZ

This month...

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ALTIN GÜN
Garip
GLITTERBEAT
7/10
Anatolian rockers pay tribute to key influence

For their sixth effort, the Amsterdam-based quintet choose to toast the legacy of late Turkish folk master Neşet Ertaş, whose music provided the soundtrack to lead singer Erdinç Içevit's childhood. Rooted in ashik tradition, Ertaş' songs are reimagined in numerous ways here, from "Niğde Bağları"'s flowing grooves and the mod-ish buzz of "Zülüf Dökülmüş Yüze" to the lovely, gently symphonic "Suçum Nedir", one of several tracks featuring the Stockholm Studio Orchestra. Altın Gün's more psychedelic tendencies are less overt this time around, though there's still plenty to enjoy, not least synth-led outlier "Bir Nazar Eyeldim".

ROB HUGHES

APPARAT
A Hum Of Maybe
MUTE
6/10
Deluxe electronica meets mushy emo-pop balladry

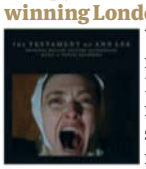
Berlin-based electronic composer Sascha Ring has been keeping busy with film scores and his supergroup project Moderat for half a decade. Now the first Apparat album since 2019's Grammy-nominated *LP5* continues Ring's drift into James Blake-adjacent singer-songwriter terrain, fusing granular samples and glitchy beats with chamber-folk arrangements and tender emo-pop vocals. Among the shape-shifting beauties here are "Lunes", which sounds like some exotic collaboration between Peter Gabriel and Ring's favourite band, Autechre; and "Enough For Me", a precision-tooled avant-funk construction peppered with sweet vocal samples of Ring's young daughter. Alas, as on *LP5*, too many self-serious lyrics and sub-Coldplay whimpers slightly hobble an otherwise lovely album.

STEPHEN DALTON

BAND OF HEATHENS
Country Sides
BOH
7/10
DIY Austinites impart lessons learned over 20 years

On *Country Sides*, Band Of Heathens co-frontmen Ed Jurdi and Gordy Quist ruminate about navigating a hardscrabble existence while hewing to the archetypal Americana of The Band and Little Feat, rather than the alt.country of their peers. The rusticity of their sound – analogised by the down-home comfort food pictured on the album cover – feels natural rather than studied on the Jurdi-sung road saga "High On Our Own Supply" ("*There's enough left to get us by*"), the Quist-led, harmony-driven anthem "She's The Night" and "Finish Something I Started", featuring Jurdi's soulful falsetto. The partners' weathered voices fit as snugly as faded jeans throughout these secular canticles and homilies, but they're just as expressive when they let their guitars do the talking.
BUD SCOPPA

DANIEL BLUMBERG
The Testament Of Ann Lee
MUTE/MILAN
7/10
Creepy choral score by Oscar-winning London composer

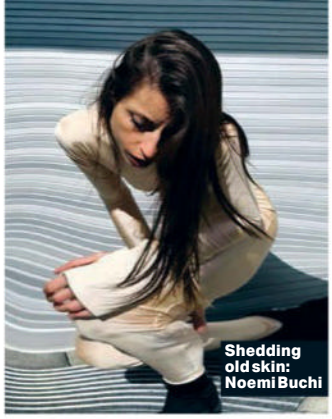


While Café Oto regular Daniel Blumberg has released three fine solo albums in recent years – 2018's *Minus* is a must-listen – he is now in demand as composer, following his Oscar-winning score for *The Brutalist*. *The Testament Of Ann Lee* sees him reunite with Norwegian filmmaker Mona Fastvold, with whom Blumberg collaborated on his first soundtrack, *The World To Come*. Her new film is about Quaker missionary Ann Lee, and Blumberg delivers an intense, experimental score that draws on religious music, reinventing and twisting traditional Quaker hymns with strings, musicians from the experimental Oto scene and a cast of 100 singers – plus lead actress Amanda Seyfried. ***PETER WATTS***

NOÉMI BÜCHI
Exuvie
OUS
7/10
Swiss electronic composer wears her high-art pretensions proudly

Composer and sound artist Noémi Büchi creates electro-classical pieces that owe as much to Mahler or Stravinsky as to her post-techno digital contemporaries. Sporting a title adapted from the Latin term for shedding old skin, and citing painter Francis Bacon as inspiration, Büchi's third album is a robust avant-symphonic affair that mostly excuses its po-faced high-art pretensions with eruptive synth melodies, cross-genre mash-ups and densely layered musique concrète collages. Standout tracks such as "The Cryptic Precision", "Dislocated Bodies" and "I Suppose" fruitfully combine thunderous percussion, eerily warped vocals and pitch-bending effects. Just a couple of stately but more conventional numbers dilute a generally terrific album.
STEPHEN DALTON

BILL CALLAHAN
My Days Of 58 DRAG CITY
8/10
Latest display of elegant wordplay comes with much self-scrutiny in the wake of loss



Shedding old skin: Noemi Buchi

In last month's *Uncut*, Callahan spoke candidly about the loss of his father and his own recent brush with mortality. It's hard, then, not to view *My Days Of 58* as among his most transparently autobiographical works, as brimming with self-scrutiny and pontification as it is elegant wordplay ("*Tarot the workflow/Take in the tableau*", he advises gnomically on "Why Do Men Sing"). The music is profoundly sympathetic, meanwhile, from the plaintive acoustic backing of "Empathy" to the pedal steel reveries of "Lake Winnebago" and the Velvets chug of "And Dream Land". It closes with the ambient Americana of "The World Is Still": hushed electronics and mournful woodwind. "*Nothing has changed and nothing ever will*".
MICHAEL BONNER

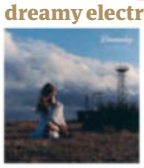
CAPTAIN WILBERFORCE
Another World. Another Life. Another Time
BLUE TUXEDO
7/10
The return of the Yorkshire melody maestros

Favourable comparisons to the songwriting of Elvis Costello and Squeeze's Difford and Tilbrook have greeted the Leeds-based band's five previous LPs, but there are broader brushstrokes of power pop and bygone new wave here. The Undertones would appear to be the template for the energetic "Four Words And The Enter Key", while the stabby organ and jerky rhythms of "Christine, You're A Drag" recall early XTC. They're more reserved but no less melodic on the lush minor chords of the ballad-like "Can't Get It Out Of My Head", the kind of affecting romantic paean that McCartney mislaid decades ago.
TERRY STAUNTON

CARDINALS
Masquerade
SO YOUNG
7/10
Young Irish quintet weathers life's slings and arrows on fraught debut

With its flagellating guitars, bleating Gaelic accordion and tortured Catholic imagery, the first album from Cork's Cardinals shudders with existential discontent. The lurching tempo shifts of opener "She Makes Me Real" set *Masquerade*'s brooding, anxious mood. Stormy eruptions roughen the title track's minor-key melody, intimating the fragility of human connection, before the pummelling intensifies with "Over At Last" and "Anhedonia". "Barbed Wire" borrows the martial crunch of The Clash's "London Calling" but projects its own sense of place – a fogbound, craggy coastline. The unrelieved gloom, daring the listener to bear the unbearable, blessedly lifts with the closing "As I Breathe", as frontman Euan Manning stoically accepts his destiny. "*Even as we fall/ I have learned the world is small*", he offers, "*and I proceed*".
BUD SCOPPA

ROSIE CARNEY
Doomsday... Don't Leave Me Here
COOLONLINE
7/10
Delicate whispers and dreamy electro-folk



Perhaps out of curiosity more than anything, Hampshire-born, Ireland-based singer-songwriter Carney generated column inches with her 2020 lockdown release, a reimagining of Radiohead's entire *The Bends* album, before making further friends with her own songs on *I Wanna Feel Happy* in 2024. That record's folk and country rock motifs surface again on *Doomsday...*, but with a glossier sheen and liberal explorations into electronica, her breathy vocals bringing an otherworldly atmosphere to existential odes like "Fragile Fantasy" and "Love So Blind". Produced and largely co-written by The 1975's Ross MacDonald, it's an album of reflective angst and gentle melodies that suggest a meeting of minds between traditional folk and shoegaze. ***TERRY STAUNTON***

CINDYTALK
Sunset And Forever
THE HELEN SCARSDALE AGENCY
8/10
Full-bodied, verdant electronics – kinetic sculptures in sound

On *Sunset And Forever*, Cindytalk's Cinder embraces the expanses of black vinyl that comprise the double album, moulding some of her most elegant compositions yet. It's rich with detail, even as the tones – glassy, mottled, vibrating – feel curiously pared back, as though Cinder has located the very essence of the electronic detritus she's sculpting. Song structures may have dissolved into the primordial scrum, but there's a clear emotional throughline from early albums such as 1984's recently reissued *Camouflage Heart* – something you can also hear in Cindytalk's other new release, the orbital textures of *That We Must Pass Through This Life*.
JON DALE

Bill Callahan: "Nothing has changed and nothing ever will..."

BILL MCCULLOUGH; NOÉMI BÜCHI

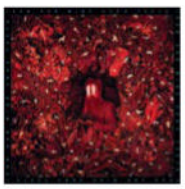
Sam Beam: dropping simple songs

IRON & WINE

Hen's Teeth SUB POP

8/10

Sam Beam finds musical liberation where folk and jazz meet.
By Fiona Shepherd



MANY artists were fundamentally rocked by the loss of work, earnings and purpose brought on by the Covid pandemic. For Sam Beam, the effect was paralysing. Unable to write anything which wasn't tainted by the shadow of lockdown, he stepped back and enjoyed precious family time instead.

The dam broke in 2022 when he recorded "Lori", an EP of Lori McKenna covers, in Memphis. Beam's own songwriting then took a turn towards the playful, even disposable, and music was fun once more. He titled his 2024 comeback *Light Verse* for its don't-sweat-it qualities. His follow-up and companion album, *Hen's Teeth*, captures something rare and precious enough: a sumptuous spirit which doesn't have to try too hard to seduce the listener.

Both albums were recorded at the same time in Dave Way's private Laurel Canyon studio with a group of LA-based musicians Beam describes as his dream band, including guitarist David Garza, Tyler Chester on keys and organ and Soul Coughing bassist Sebastian Steinberg, with whom he worked on *Love Letter For Fire*, his 2016 collaboration with Jesca Hoop. Harmony trio I'm With Her, the thrice-as-mighty alliance of Sarah Watkins, Sarah Jarosz and Aoife O'Donovan, guest on a couple of songs written with their voices in mind and Paul Jacob Cartwright contributes standout string arrangements.

At the time of this writing and recording renaissance, Beam was digging *Astral Weeks*, influenced by its heady confluence of styles. In short, Beam got jazz. He has worked with jazz players before, on 2007's political parable *Shepherd's Dog* and the chilled *Ghost On Ghost*, subtle diversions in a catalogue which encompasses the lo-fi folk on which Iron & Wine were founded, the slicker pop arrangements of *Kiss Each Other Clean* and back to the neither beastly nor epic *Beast Epic*.

Light Verse was another gentle curveball, pointing the way to *Hen's Teeth* with the luxe balm of "Taken By Surprise" and the John Martyn-esque melodic choices of "Tears That Don't Matter"; but *Hen's Teeth* is where Beam truly leans into the possibilities of dropping simple songs into the laps of intuitive musicians and delighting in what emerges.

Opener "Roses" begins with simple chords and Beam's inviting voice, slightly husky, tremulous and conversational in his phrasing, before layering on the reedy twang of guitar, soft drumming and subtle time-signature changes to create an immersive sonic world. The arrangement moves with the lyrics from gentle introspection to a more unsettling swirl of sound and ends in stirring, symphonic country territory.

Beam boils it right down to physical matter on "Paper And Stone", mining memories, philosophising hazily ("*say who we are*") and freely associating over soothing guitar and solitary, spiralling violin. He stays in nature for "Robin's Egg", where the strong Laurel Canyon connection is only enhanced by the backing vocals of I'm With Her, who elevate proceedings with soulful stridency before resolving into a dreamy chorus and luxuriating in wherever the internal rhymes, from "*namby pamby*" to "*loosey goosey*", take them. Their other contribution, "Wait Up", suggests those voices need to be available on prescription.

Beam accesses his own soulful falsetto on the charming "Singing Saw", which plays out like one of David Crosby's psychedelic fantasias enhanced with dramatic stabs of piercing violin and groaning bass and Beam's eldest daughter Arden providing the fragrant vocal balance. "Grace Notes" features father/daughter close harmonies accompanied by solo violin, the trill of mandolin and an unexpected loungey piano and Western swing string break.

The breezy '70s country rock of "In Your Ocean" sounds straightforward in this company but there is never a bad time to wallow in its massed vocals and subtle Hammond licks. This is as extroverted as the album gets, but the delicate vocals, jazz bassline and all-round Nick Drake-like reverie of "Dates And Dead People" exerts its own pull as it builds to a swelling, percussive waltz.

Arguably the most engaging example of Beam's musical liberation is "Defiance, Ohio". Never mind the Midwest, this track belongs on a Brazilian beach with its carefree whistling, twinkling kalimba, delicate guitar and cinematic strings. Having paddled so sweetly in tropicália waters, it's little wonder that by the end of *Hen's Teeth*, Beam sounds so blissful and contented, harmonising with himself on the languorous country of closer "Half Measures".

SLEEVE NOTES

1 Roses
2 Paper And Stone
3 Robin's Egg
4 Singing Saw
5 In Your Ocean
6 Defiance, Ohio
7 Wait Up
8 Grace Notes
9 Dates And Dead People
10 Half Measures

Produced by: Sam Beam
Recorded at: Waystation, Laurel Canyon, Los Angeles
Personnel: Sam Beam (vocals, guitar), Arden Beam (vocals), Paul Jacob Cartwright (violin, viola, mandolin, mandola, tenor guitar, string arrangements), Tyler Chester (piano, organ, keys), David Garza (guitars, zither, kalimba), Griffin Goldsmith (drums, percussion), Beth Goodfellow (drums, percussion), Kyle Crane (drums, percussion), Sebastian Steinberg (bass), Sarah Jarosz (vocals), Aoife O'Donovan (vocals), Sara Watkins (vocals)

Q&A

Sam Beam: "I'm always trying to shake things up"

You have described *Hen's Teeth* and *Light Verse* as siblings – how would you characterise their relationship?
I don't know, maybe they're fraternal twins! Ones that get along OK and don't really compete because they have their own interests. They're both unique but if you hear them speaking to one another you can tell they grew up in the same house.

***Hen's Teeth* breaks some new musical ground for you. What's the influence of jazz on the album?**
I'm always trying to shake things up in one way or another, and experimenting with genre is a fun one. Playing with jazz musicians makes it easier to switch from one vocabulary to another pretty quickly. Pretty sure "Defiance, Ohio" is my first samba, but I've been wrong about these things before.

What was it like duetting with your daughter Arden?
Incredible! Indescribable! Just so much fun. She's on the shy side so it took a little convincing, but hearing her come up on the speakers with me was a pure joy. I'm With Her tracked their vocals remotely and separately, so there was this great moment of anticipation when we finally got all the parts and pressed play. Sonic bliss!

You've said you are obsessed with duets – who would be your ultimate duet partner?
Sade – she's always had one of my favourite voices, no contest!

INTERVIEW: FIONA SHEPHERD

KIMBLACK

Shabaka Hutchings: into the woodwinds

SHABAKA

Of The Earth SHABAKA

7/10

The sax is back, but not the star on this curious electronic excursion. *By Sam Richards*

IN December 2023, after a couple of astonishing concerts in which he reimagined and reinvigorated John Coltrane's jazz touchstone *A Love Supreme*, Shabaka Hutchings decided to retire his primary instrument, the saxophone. When *Uncut* spoke to him a few months later, ahead of the release of his largely sax-free solo album *Perceive Its Beauty, Acknowledge Its Grace*, he was travelling around Brazil with a case of around 50 bamboo and clay flutes he'd obtained from local instrument-makers. Evidently, he was on a very different trip to the one that had initially established him as the figurehead of the new UK jazz explosion.

What Hutchings didn't reveal at the time was that his carry-case also contained a couple of electronic gadgets – including a Roland SP-404 sampler and a toy-like Teenage Engineering OP-1 synthesiser – that he'd been tinkering with since the lockdowns of 2020. Listening to Bartók's *Concerto For Orchestra* on a four-hour coach ride from Paraty to Rio, he found a section he particularly liked, sampled it, cut it up, and by the time he arrived on the Copacabana, he had a finished track that accurately represented his state of mind as he ricocheted between different continents and musical worlds.

In the end, that track didn't make it onto *Of The Earth* after Hutchings decided not to sample anyone but himself, self-sufficiency being his new frontier. But it pointed the way forward. Not only could he make a record without saxophone, he could make a record by himself, anywhere in the world, without anyone else involved.

As it happens, the sax was to make a dramatic late return. This September, performing at a memorial concert for South African drummer Louis Moholo, Hutchings felt that it would be inappropriate to play anything other than the instrument with which he'd backed Moholo as part of the 'Five Blokes' band. And so, with the saxophone back in his hands for the first time in 18 months, he revisited the almost-finished *Of The Earth*, adding new riffs and melodies throughout. Indeed, the plaintive peal of his tenor sax is one of the first things you hear on the album, amid a cascade of New Age-y synth tones on opener "A Future Untold". But this isn't really a saxophone record. Instead *Of The Earth* is largely defined by the defiant chuntering of those electronic rhythm boxes and the insistent, hypnotic clusters of flutes. Sometimes the sax offers a crucial, lyrical counterpoint, but just as often it is subsumed into the carnival, blurting and jerking along to the rowdy lo-fi beats.

The results are often so far from the lush, dreamy sounds of *Perceive Its Beauty, Acknowledge Its Grace* – recorded in high-fidelity at the storied Van Gelder Studios in New Jersey – that they initially sound a little jarring. Hutchings has some of the best jazz drummers in the world on speed-dial, so it's inevitable that you might begin to wonder what's been lost by replacing them with his own hiccuping electronic beats – sometimes sequenced, sometimes tapped out manually on a Roland HandSonic drumpad. But soon enough you're drawn into this strange, swampy new world.

At times you could be listening to the mischievous electro-cumbia of Colombia's Meridian Brothers or the hectic Afro-electronica of Uganda's Ngeye Nyege Tapes label, perhaps even some early grime loops. Then again, when the sax bursts though on "Stand Firm", it's not a million miles from the urgent punk-jazz of Hutchings' former band, Sons Of Kemet.

The forthright messaging of that quartet was often bolstered by the compelling spoken-word interventions of poet/rapper Joshua Idehen. On two tracks here, to maintain autonomy, Hutchings takes to the microphone himself to denounce "*the worldview fibreoptic*" and oppressors both external and internal. He's not a natural vocalist, but he is clearly a sharp wordsmith, and he delivers the wide-ranging sermon of "Go Astray" with a calm fury ("*They come to speculate futures/I stay blind to the sharks/That reside in the heart*").

Hutchings always wears his heart on his sleeve, and with no other musicians involved, *Of The Earth* represents the purest possible distillation of his current musical and philosophical worldview. That doesn't mean it's always a satisfying listen. Several tracks feel stilted and half-formed, journeys rather than destinations – which is, of course, exactly what they are. Having blown up his existing structures, this is the first, tentative step on the road to somewhere new. What's next could be *really* interesting.

SLEEVE NOTES

1 A Future Untold
2 Those Of The Sky
3 Go Astray
4 Step Lightly
5 Call The Power
6 Dance In Praise
7 Ol' Time African Gods
8 Marwa The Mountain
9 Light The Way
10 Stand Firm
11 Space Time
12 Eyes Lowered

Produced and performed by: Shabaka Hutchings

Q&A

Shabaka Hutchings: "It became a challenge to myself"

When did you realise you were making an electronic record?
The machines actually came at the same time as I started learning the shakuhachi [flute] in lockdown, and it's just been hovering in the background in terms of me making music on the road, in airports or on tour buses, mostly for myself, just learning the equipment and making little beats. It was only at the beginning of last year when I realised that this music was actually where I'm at.

The album comes across as a kind of rhythmic travelogue. Were any of the tracks directly inspired by specific locations?
Probably "Marwa The Mountain". I was in Martinique, and there was this Rara band. It's street processional music where you've got these single-note long horns and all this polyphonic counterpoint. They had a procession around the street – I remember following them around and then coming back into where I was staying and listening to that tune in a completely different way.

Have you ever used your own vocals on a track before?
Never. It started as a joke in relation to André 3000: if André can do an album on flute, then I can do an album where I rap! But from that, it became a challenge to myself. I've written poetry before, but I've not really recited any of the stuff that I've written. There's something fulfilling about actually being able to give a voice to what you write. *INTERVIEW: SAM RICHARDS*

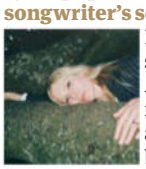
JOSEPH OUECHEN

ORA COGAN
Hard Hearted Woman
SACRED BONES
8/10
Canadian folk singer-songwriter dives into psych folk

Recorded mostly in a remote corner of British Columbia, Ora Cogan's follow-up to her 2023 breakout *Formless* moves like it's caught in an undertow, pushed along by some unseen force. Her band keep the songs flowing at an unnervingly steady clip, as she alternates between fighting the current and giving in. That approach, coupled with vocals balancing despair and determination, lends "The Smoke", with its cathedral synths, and especially "Division", with its narcotised krautrock drumbeat, an unsettling energy that's both treacherous and cathartic, as Cogan ponders decay and regrowth. "*Everything in ruins*", she sings on opener "Honey", "*but the light is so sweet*".

STEPHEN DEUSNER

ALICE COSTELLOE
Move On With The Year
MOSHI MOSHI
7/10
Laurel Canyon meets synthpop on singer-songwriter's solo debut



London-based singer-songwriter Alice Costelloe, formerly of alternative indie band Big Deal, has been making music since her early teens. Big Deal were clearly indebted to grungy '90s alt.rock, but on her solo debut Costelloe pirouettes towards freewheeling folk, shimmering synths and The Beatles' more psychedelic moments. The result is an album of gently textured art pop, the lightness of her voice and almost ethereal sounds in direct contrast to the diaristic darkness of lyrics that explore raw, familial emotions. It's best expressed on "If I Could Reach You", a mesmerising meditation on the difficulty and, perhaps, impossibility of communication.

ANA GAVRILOVSKA

CROOKED FINGERS
Swet Deth MERGE
8/10
Winning return of Eric Bachmann's neglected alt.rock project

Solo work and the reconstituted Archers Of Loaf have been Bachmann's priorities of late, but the arrival of more involved, expansive songs has led him to revive Crooked Fingers after a 15-year studio absence. Regular cohorts Jon Rauhouse (pedal steel) and Jeremy Wheatley (drums/percussion) are back too, along with a bevy of guests that includes Sharon Van Etten and The National's Matt Berninger. And while the lyrics largely deal in anguish and dissolution, Bachmann's settings switch between exhilarating noise ("Cold Waves", featuring Superchunk's Mac McCaughan), grand synth-pop ("Hospital") and quasi-orchestral soul ballads (the sweeping "(I'm Your) Bodhisattva").

ROB HUGHES

Ora Cogan: unsettling energy

DAPHNI
Butterfly
JIAOLONG
7/10
Caribou's Dan Snaith lets his clubbier alter ego off the leash

With Caribou suffering a misfire with 2024's AI-enhanced *Honey*, Daphni may be emerging as the more reliably enthralling of Dan Snaith's two principal musical endeavours. On his first Daphni album in four years, Snaith largely maintains the requisite club-friendly bpm rates while deftly integrating more surprising elements like the Satie-style keyboard figures in "Sad Piano House", the steel-pan flourishes in "Miles Smiles" and the air of pastoral psych whimsy that pervades the gentler "Invention". Elsewhere, his magpie sensibility pays off with "Talk To Me" and "Two Maps", two muscular exercises in old-school Detroit techno, and "Waiting So Long", a crafty throwback to French Touch at peak exuberance.

JASON ANDERSON

DEAD DADS CLUB
Dead Dads Club FICTION
7/10
Former Palma Violets man tackles childhood grief on eclectic return

After the collapse of the greatly hyped indie band Palma Violets, and a brief foray into pop songwriting, Chilli Jesson returns with a new project that explores the death of his father owing to drug addiction when he was just 14. Produced by Fontaines DC's Carlos O'Connell, the album is raw, personal and open, mirroring its genre-hopping approach. From the industrial electronic thrum of "Humming Wires" to the uplifting indie singalong of "That's Life" via the Pavement-like "Need This Around", it's a record rooted in Jesson opening up his sound, and himself, as much as he can. An ambitious and spirited album.

DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

DEATHCRASH
Somersaults
UNTITLED (RECS)
8/10
London band grapple with adulthood on album of emo-tinged slowcore

There's always been an undercurrent of Midwestern emo to Deathcrash's post-rock meets slowcore sound, but they lean further into it on their more vocal-heavy latest. On "NYC", singer Tiernan Banks ponders band life and turning 30, over infectious guitar hooks that glide from woozy and melancholic to crunchy and eruptive. "The Thing You Did" balances pathos with meaty riffs and an almost euphoric vocal delivery, while the melodic prettiness of "Love For M" almost belies the weightiness of its heavy lyrics. Expansive and introspective, quiet and loud, sad but triumphant, there are endless pleasing dualities explored here.

DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

THE DELINES
The Set Up
DECOR
9/10
Bruised soul-noir from Willy Vlautin, Amy Boone and co

In Willy Vlautin's latest novel *The Left And The Lucky*, one character talks about scoring a second-hand copy of Esther Phillips' 1972 album, *From A Whisper To A Scream*. Phillips' hard luck story wouldn't be out of place here on The Delines' exemplary seventh album, alongside Vlautin's latest pin-sharp vignettes of drifters, con artists and the left behind. Behind Vlautin's writing and Amy Boone's poised, soulful delivery, Cory Gray's horns swoon and sway in sympathy with the grifter's daughter in "Can You Get Me Out Of Phoenix" or his gentle piano sketches out the junkie in "Walking With His Sleeves Down". As Boone summarises on "The Reckless Life": "*Some come back and some don't...*"

MICHAEL BONNER

DOREA
O Que Mais Você Quer Saber De Mim?
AJABU!
7/10
Tender-hearted troubadour channels the golden age of Brazilian folk-pop

A Brazilian construction worker and sometime tribute singer who only launched his own tentative singer-songwriter career in his late thirties, Dorea's wistful folk-pop sound is clearly steeped in nostalgic pastiche, but it has a warm, grainy analogue charm. The luminous fingerpicked guitars, jazzy arrangements and impressionistic lyrics of romantic ballads like "Mais Que Dois", "Sem Ancorar" and "Até Que Seque" invoke the post-bossa MPB sound that swept Brazil in the 1970s. Alongside the seascapes of his native Salvador, Dorea cites vintage Neil Young and Milton Nascimento's cult classic 1972 album/artistic collective *Clube da Esquina* as key inspirations on this unassuming but sporadically sublime collection.

STEPHEN DALTON

The Delines: pin-sharp vignettes

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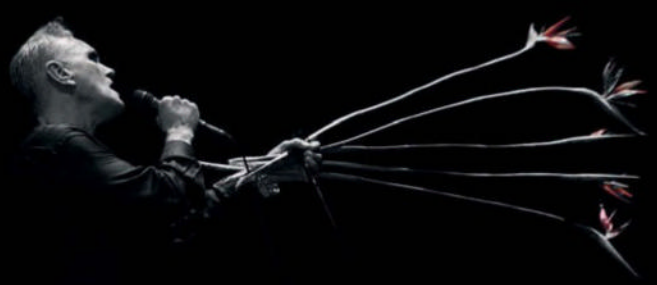

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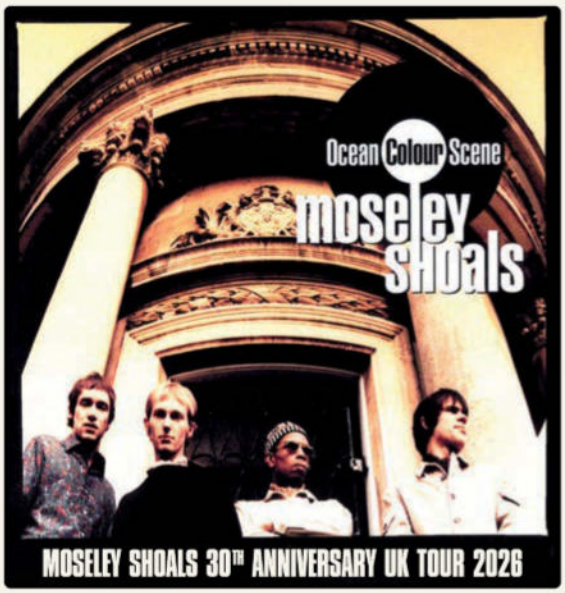

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TUESDAY 08 DECEMBER ★ BRIGHTON CENTRE ★
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AMERICANA

Album of the month

Buchanan: on a road to somewhere

JAY BUCHANAN

Weapons Of Beauty

SACRED TONGUE/THIRTY TIGERS

7/10

Rival Sons singer renders fine solo debut

BUCHANAN'S connection to Americana might seem tenuous given his association with Rival Sons, the dashing Californian rockers he's fronted for the past 17 years, but there are several pointers. His teenage years, for instance, were spent busking and playing coffee shops, developing a solo acoustic repertoire from the constituent parts of folk, blues and country. And while Rival Sons went on to fill arenas and tour with Black Sabbath and Guns N'Roses, Buchanan found time to collaborate with the likes of Jason Isbell, Brandi Carlile and Anderson East.

The arrival of *Weapons Of Beauty*, then, isn't quite the left turn it may appear. This is Buchanan returning to his troubadour roots, enlisting a small team of trusted Nashville types, among them guitarist JD Simo and pedal-steel player Leroy Powell, as backing band. Longtime Rival Sons producer Dave Cobb is on hand too, framing these anguished country-soul ballads around Buchanan's unfailingly dynamic voice. The singer has clearly been digging deep, emerging from his writing space (a Mojave desert bunker beneath an old gold mine) with songs that speak of struggle, personal salvation and the redemptive properties of love.

With its unfussy piano and steady shuffle, "High And Lonesome" is informed by Buchanan's physical surroundings, his memories colliding amid the pressing silence of "*these dark cave walls*". And while "True Black" and "Sway" both showcase his quaking vocals, the more low-key "Deep Swimming" is an ensemble piece fixed in bittersweet childhood nostalgia, a temporal palace of scratched-up records, zebra figurines and late-night movie marathons.

Elsewhere, Leonard Cohen's "Dance Me To The End Of Love" gets a soulful R&B makeover, doubling as a homage to Van Morrison. Springsteen is another touchstone here. The semi-autobiographical "Tumbleweeds" sounds akin to something from *Nebraska* or *The Ghost Of Tom Joad*, a fitting analogue given Buchanan's recent turn as leader of the Stone Pony's house band in *Springsteen: Deliver Me From Nowhere*. Indeed, he even brought in Scott Cooper, the film's writer/director, to sequence *Weapons Of Beauty*'s running order. Smart work all round.

ROB HUGHES

AMERICANA ROUND-UP

AWAY from his belated Sky Chiefs debut, Stephen McCarthy returns to his regular gig with **The Long Ryders** for *High Noon Hymns* (CHERRY RED), due in late March. Once again produced by Ed Stasium, the album also welcomes back The Old 97s' Murry Hammond on bass and X drummer DJ Bonebrake on vibes. Leader Sid Griffin describes the result as "two thirds the distilled alt. country genre we helped found back in the 1980s and one third Paisley Underground adventurism, yet with a dash of our own crazed soulfulness thrown in."

Melissa Etheridge returns that same week with *Rise* (SUN), her first all-new studio collection in seven years. Co-produced at LA's Sunset Sound with Shooter Jennings, it includes Chris Stapleton duet "The Other Side Of Blue" and the poignant "Call You", a tribute to Etheridge's son, Beckett, who died of causes related to opioid addiction in 2020. "Sometimes you're gonna taste the dirt, but then you're gonna rise," Etheridge says of the impetus behind the album's broad emotional reach. Meanwhile, Shooter's nephew **Whey Jennings** issues the confessional *Baptised By Fire* (DIRT ROCK EMPIRE). The Nashville singer-songwriter (grandson of Waylon Jennings and Jessi Colter) continues to channel his experiences as a father, troubadour, recovering addict and man of faith through country ballads, honky-tonk stirrers and bluesy rockers. "The songs on this album present an open window to both my heart and soul as a songwriter," he says. ***ROB HUGHES***

The Long Ryders

BILL FRISELL

In My Dreams BLUE NOTE

7/10

Guitarist's 75th birthday celebration with strings

To call Frisell a jazz guitarist only tells part of the story. His discography – solo and with collaborators such as John Zorn and Paul Motian – runs to around 100 albums and encompasses folk, country and every other facet of Americana. All are represented on this set recorded with a string section of violin, viola and cello. "When We Go" inhabits some lazy Hawaiian lagoon, the title track lurches woozily like it's about to break out into a waltz but never does, and "Hard Times" is an aching Celtic/Appalachian ballad. We end with the loveliest take on "Home On The Range" you've ever heard.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

ASHER GAMEDZE

A Semblance: Of Return NORTHERN SPY

8/10

Grooving exploration of coming together through music

On his latest album, South African drummer, composer and bandleader Asher Gamedze channels a liberatory impulse through a blend of jazz and experimental soul, grounded in pan-Africanism and black consciousness. *A Semblance* is also the name of the ensemble, composed of musicians from Cape Town's independent scene, with instrumentation that includes percussion, keyboards, synths, bass, trumpet and group vocals. Heavy grooves and deep politics animate this intensely thoughtful music, which calls to mind the mid-'70s jazz-funk of Herbie Hancock's Headhunters and the consciousness-raising work of The Last Poets, both aspects coming together in riveting harmony on penultimate track "State (Of The Internation)".

ANA GAVRILOVSKA

GOGOL BORDELLO

We Mean It, Man! CASA GOGOL

7/10

Veteran folk-punkers pivot somewhat more punk than folk

Borrowing a title from a Sex Pistols song is a pretty unmistakable statement of intent, and so it proves. *We Mean It, Man!* ranks high among Gogol Bordello's rowdiest, and, therefore, their best. The signature eastern European folk riffs and rhythms remain exuberantly present, especially on "Ignition" and "Boiling Point", but matters get violently and splendidly Clash-like on "From Boyarka To Boyaca" and "No Time For Idiots". New Order's Bernard Sumner guests on a new mix of the rewritten version of Angelic Upstarts' "Solidarity" that Gogol Bordello originally recorded in 2023 to raise money for prosthetics for wounded Ukrainian soldiers. ***ANDREW MUELLER***

MATTHEW WIGNALL; HENRY DILTZ

Buck Meek: no ordinary Joe

BUCK MEEK

The Mirror 4AD

8/10

Intrigue and effortless charm on the Texan's fourth.
By Sharon O'Connell

LAST year's *Double Infinity* made Big Thief afresh, a lineup shift prompting them to welcome various new collaborators to help shape its sound. Now, on their guitarist's latest solo album, *The Mirror*, that openness has made its mark again: Meek has embraced an experimental recording practice, invited along a wide pool of friends and family, and reconnected with the messy authenticity of the self.

Recorded in LA at the log-cabin studio owned by the artist and his wife, Germaine Dunes, who guests, and produced by Big Thief drummer James Krivchenia, *The Mirror* is, in many ways, peak Meek – a batch of candid and deceptively affable country/folk-leaning songs that occasionally kick up rock dust and whose lyrics are an unfussily poetic pleasure. Meek's music is at ease with itself, as comfortable as his Texan twang is charming, and given to judicious flashes of humour. However, the title points to a veiled complexity: Meek recorded his vocals on the studio's front porch while the band played inside and Krivchenia created a digital simulacrum of the sound (or "slurm", the Ableton meme turned microgenre), which was integrated with the live recordings to add subtle new dimensions to the songs.

Other mirrorings on the record are textual, notably "Heart In The Mirror", where Meek uses a metaphor of backwards writing to consider love's surety and overcoming fear and regret: "*Tried to choke the lump in my throat, but it only got bigger/Backwards life is easier to write/With a finger on my heart in the mirror*". Long a one-stop symbolic shop for portals to other worlds, truthful revelation, self-knowledge and vanity, the mirror figures in "Worms", too. "*We're all looking for love*", declares Meek. "*I'm praying that the angels come/The angel of fear/I've been fighting with him in the mirror*".

All of which may suggest a tortured, gothic-country bent, especially alongside lines like "*My demon is my darkness and my darkness is my angel*" (from the churning, twangling "Demon", co-written with Adrianne Lenker) and mentions of jimsonweed and the meadow death camas. But there's no stylised melodrama here: though Meek gives voice to self-doubt and anxiety, he does so lightly. He also (again) celebrates love like a giddy teen, gives thanks for its profundity and, despite his existential questioning, generally marvels at life.

"Gasoline" opens, moving at a clip offset by its slightly forlorn acoustic guitar melody, over which Meek's distinctive voice lays bare new love's grip ("*One month and she's in my blood*"), and invents new words to express it. Doubt appears straight after ("*Can I learn to give away my heart?*") in "Pretty Flowers", which is carried on crisp beats and keyboard ripples with backing vocals encouraging it to bloom. "*Last night I lost my temper and punched the wall/I think I broke a finger and broke your heart*", begins "Can I Mend It?" Here, Meek frets about revealing "*the dark side of my soul*" over a melody that punctuates a Kurt Vile-ish swagger with a treated female vocal clip.

Along more regular, country-rock lines, there's the see-sawing plea for kindness that is "God Knows Why", while the aforementioned "Worms" mixes spoken word with a gently swinging chorus and chucks in a burst of skronky electric guitar.

The album's surprises fall late in the second half. "Soul Feeling" (a co-write with Krivchenia) and "Déjà Vu" owe a debt to Young's gnarly classicism, the former – a lunging ode to an old friend succumbing to dementia – by way of Lou Barlow; the latter, in which Meek imagines communicating with a loved one after his own death, also recalling Yo La Tengo. The set closes with "Outta Body", whose freewheeling melody and woodblock beats are a neat counter to its metaphysical intrigue – waking dreams, hallucinations and the capturing of mind states for future use.

Across *The Mirror*, its author is pulled into and out of darkness and light. It's in "Demon", though, that he acknowledges the power of the creature within him, "*crawling in the weeds*" whenever he thinks he's killed it. "*I try to write to contain my life*", Meek explains, but fortunately for us, he can't stop it from breaking free.

SLEEVE NOTES

1 Gasoline
2 Pretty Flowers
3 Can I Mend It?
4 Ring Of Fire
5 Demon
6 God Knows Why
7 Heart In The Mirror
8 Worms
9 Soul Feeling
10 Déjà Vu
11 Outta Body

Produced by: James Krivchenia
Recorded at: Ringo Bingo, Los Angeles
Personnel includes: Buck Meek (acoustic & electric guitars, vocals), Adam Brisbin (electric & acoustic guitars), Ken Woodward (bass), Jesse Quebbeman-Turley, Kyle Crane, Jonathan Wilson (drums), Adrian Olsen (keyboard, modular synth), James Krivchenia (percussion, keyboard, slurm), Alex Somers (piano, keyboard), Dylan Meek (keyboard), Mary Lattimore (harp), Germaine Dunes, Tony Presley (percussion), Jolie Holland (whistle)

Q&A

Buck Meek: "Love is the bridge between truth and fantasy"

In the run-up to making *The Mirror*, what was on your mind?
I wanted to be honest, say the thing I was afraid to say, to not waste people's time, make up words, be immature, write something ugly, something pretty, something beautiful, to write a diss track for the haters that's also a love song, write a dance song for my grandmother, a rock song for my grandfather, and squeeze in some quasi-science to impress my lady. If I could make myself laugh or cry, it made the record.

Are love songs still the hardest to write?
My favourite love songs are the ones that are very simple. Love is so universally understood it often feels trite to try and explain it, yet somehow I would bet every one of us has been moved by a good one. So the game is to say the same thing that's been said for thousands of years around the world, but in an ever so slightly new way. Also, for me, love is the bridge between truth and fantasy, so I try to write with that in mind.

Can you unpack the song "Demon"?
Sometimes I'm motivated by fear, or the temptation to lie to myself in order to please others, or by vanity, greed, etc. Writing songs always goes best when I'm in a state of play, [which] helps me connect with what's beneath those motivations: the wild shapeless thing inside that just wants to run and be loved.

INTERVIEW: SHARON O'CONNELL

GERMAINE VAN DER SANDEN

NATHAN FAKE
Evaporator INFINÉ
7/10
Seventh heaven for Norfolk rave doyen

Evaporator is Nathan Fake's seventh album in 20 years and the first one to feature his face on the cover. But don't read anything into that: this is more of the same bucolic electronica and smudgy rave that Fake does so well – even he calls this record "quite pleasant" – yet there's still something magnetic in the way he laces curdled synth washes with pretty arpeggios ("The Ice House") or assembles cubist dancefloor nuggets that slosh around drunkenly ("Bialystok"). His pal Chris Clark joins him on "Orbiting Meadows", but it's the nine-minute celestial throb of "Slow Yamaha" that should win Fake new admirers.
PIERS MARTIN

THE HEADS
Yourprettyplace isgoingtohell ROOSTER
7/10
First new material in 20 years from Peel-loved Bristol stoner psych band

Formed in the '90s from a love of playing mind-meltingly loud and sustained through sporadic DIY releases, two Heads play in Loop these days. That era's UK psychedelic underground, Monster Magnet and Mudhoney's sludgy heaviness and Hawkwind and Stooges prototypes form the mulch for this unexpected double. Dirty wah-wah, overdriven and phased guitar mark opener "Hit Like A Dove", while fuzz detonations interrupt "Can't Stop The Rushing"'s prog-motorik progress. The pastoral "Sunquaker" and tough rocker "Bullets Fly But No Bees" deal in modern hippie disquiet at the UK's slashed social and natural fabric. The real message is in "Off"'s dogged groove through fugs of fuzz, offering perhaps chemically assisted dislocation from earthly cares.
NICK HASTED

HEAVENLY
Highway To Heavenly
SKEP WAX
8/10
Welcome return for influential Sarah Records graduates

Heavenly: the opposite of sexagenarian

If Heavenly's youthful exuberance was impressive in the 1990s, it's even more so now they've reached their sixties on their first album in 30 years. Amelia Fletcher and Cathy Rogers' harmonies remain charmingly sweet, whether cooing over frantic, distorted guitars on "Excuse Me", celebrating diversity on the irrepressible "Portland Town" ("*Conformity stinks, creativity's free*"), or poignantly observing a loveless relationship on "A Different Beat" ("*Five foot six in her heels from Lidl*"). That the story of "*that time I tipped you out of your wheelchair*" on "That Last Day" can be simultaneously dramatic, moving and joyful confirms their enduring appeal.
WYNDHAM WALLACE

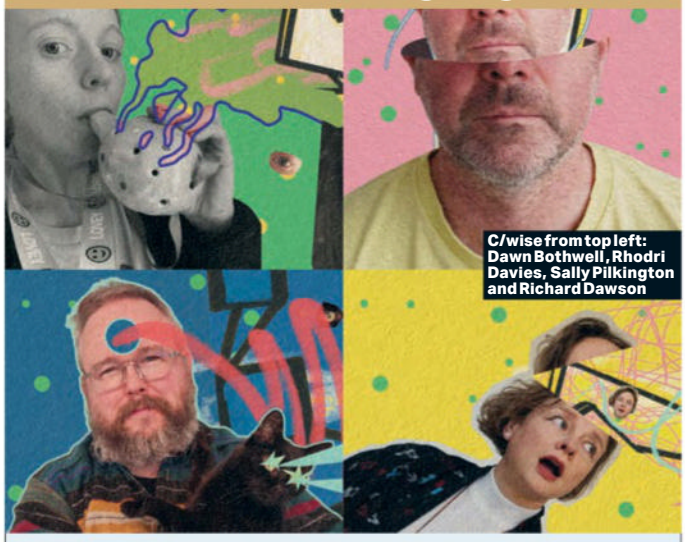
HEN OGLEDD
Discombobulated
WEIRD WORLD
9/10
Richard Dawson and co sound inimitable on arresting latest

So much more than a side-project of its most well-known member, Hen Ogledd are a truly unique offering. On album three as a four-piece, they wrestle with personal and political crises, but invite friends, family and children along as collaborators to create a record that is introspective and expansive, plucking joy and defiance from turmoil. "Scales Will Fall" merges chamber pop with hip-hop-inspired political spoken word, layered vocal harmonies, melodic psych-pop and avant-rock wig outs, complete with a triumphant chorus. The 20-minute "Clear Pools" is a gorgeous plunge into restorative nature that sounds like a long-lost Canterbury Scene gem in parts, while sounding like absolutely nothing else in others. A truly singular record.
DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

MIDORI HIRANO
Otonoma
THRILL JOCKEY
8/10
Berlin-based Japanese composer wows with neo-classical synth fantasias

Midori Hirano's classical piano training has long been the foundation for her serene and sumptuous voyages through analogue and modular synths, and the Kyoto-born, Berlin-based composer strikes an especially captivating balance of traditional and futuristic modes on her latest for Thrill Jockey. On "Illuminance" and "Blue Horizon", Hirano develops her own vivid vocabulary from forms, figures and sounds pioneered by Philip Glass and Suzanne Ciani. Conversely, "Rainwalk" and "In Colours" evoke the most delicate piano pieces of Ryuichi Sakamoto. Yet even in *Otonoma*'s quietest moments, Hirano's music benefits from a remarkable richness of scope.
JASON ANDERSON

REVELATIONS



C/wise from top left: Dawn Bothwell, Rhodri Davies, Sally Pilkington and Richard Dawson

HEN OGLEDD

Chips of wisdom from Sally Pilkington and Dawn Bothwell

"We didn't set out to make a political album," says Hen Ogledd's Sally Pilkington. "Our focus was on our personal journeys as we'd all been through difficult times and different varieties of meltdown, grief, healing and re-emergence." However, with the state of the world as it is, it became unavoidable that wider issues would seep in. "We poured in our outrage, anger and sadness but ultimately wanted to bring a feeling of hope, solidarity, defiance and possibility. There's a hopeful parallel between the personal and political in terms of collapse and rebirth, cycles, seasons, new beginnings and the ability to change and grow."

It became clear while exploring this middle ground that they were also tapping into unique musical magic. "It blows my mind when I hear something one of the band shares," says Dawn Bothwell. "To take that tiny starting point and allow it to reverberate and develop." The result, for Bothwell, is an album that "paints a picture of a place that is both familiar and unknown. A bit like a bad dream but with chips of wisdom from wise and unwise people – fables which lead to uncomfortable untruths." ***DANIEL DYLAN WRAY***

CHRISTOPHER HOFFMAN
Rex
OUT OF YOUR HEAD
7/10
Cellist records multitracked solos in a house once owned by artist Rex Brasher

American cellist Hoffman is best known for his work with Yoko Ono, Iron & Wine, Henry Threadgill and James Brandon Lewis, but the 13 miniatures on this solo LP sound nothing like any of them. Occasionally he plays acoustically: "Snow Owls" and "The Babbling" invoke the shivery, hypnotic minimalism of Arthur Russell, while "Spindrift" sees Hoffman multi-tracking until he sounds like a large string section. But on most of the tracks he uses so many effects that his instrument rarely sounds like a cello at all: fuzz basslines growl, harmony lines resemble synths, and improvised lead lines sound like Jaco Pastorius solos.
JOHN LEWIS

JON HOPKINS/ BIGGI HILMARS
Wilding DOMINO SOUNDTRACKS
6/10
Electronic artist slows down on score for nature doc

Along with Icelandic composer Biggi Hilmars, Jon Hopkins scored the 2023 doc *Wilding*, about a vast rewilding experiment in West Sussex. The resulting soundtrack is a suitably gentle, textural and slow piece of work that leans into an acoustic and organic sound palette. "Wilding Theme" merges snippets of floaty vocals with sparse piano and immersive soundscapes to create something light but weighty, while tracks like "Back To The Farm" use tense strings to create a charged atmosphere. It's a skilled bit of work, but it remains a specific score for a specific project and doesn't always flow as an album outside that context.
DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

ALISON WONDERLAND

MARIELLE V JAKOBSONS
The Patterns Lost To Air
THRILL JOCKEY
8/10
Oakland composer returns with a dreamily inventive collection

Marielle V Jakobsons' first solo album in a decade sounds lusher than it actually is. Her compositions sprout and mushroom into odd shapes, rooted in both the cosmic and the earthly, and she comes across like a philosopher who expresses theorems via notes and chords. But she uses the same few instruments throughout: her violin, with its tensile drone; a Moog synthesiser, with its celestial burbles; and the warm tones of a Fender Rhodes. It's a testament to Jakobsons' imagination that each song has its own sense of purpose and identity, whether it's the awed opener "Warm Spring" or the stargazing closer "Silently Spinning Around You". ***STEPHEN DEUSNER***

KMRU
Kin EDITIONS MEGO
7/10
Ambient soundscapes from the Nairobi-born, Berlin-based electronicist

Kenyan sound artist Joseph Kamaru, aka KMRU, makes atmospheric, drone-based electronica that might serve as meditation music for a particularly murderous therapy session. Some tracks are more like installation art: "They Are Here" starts with the resonant sound of an amplified room that coalesces into shards of noises and chords that never resolve; "Maybe" sounds like a temple gong being mutilated; "We Are" uses harsh, metallic synths to create dissonant soundscapes. Austrian experimentalist Christian Fennesz plays guitar on the shimmering, neo-orchestral "Blurred", but the highlight might be the closer "By Absence", where a single-note drone is slowly orchestrated over the course of 20 minutes. ***JOHN LEWIS***

LUCY KRUGER & THE LOST BOYS
Pale Bloom UNIQUE
7/10
Berlin-based South African's bigger sound lets the light in

Despite the band-style project name, Lucy Kruger has attracted a darkly clad fanbase in her adopted home of Germany with six collections of mostly studio-created, noirish art-rock confessionals. On her third album in three years, though, a full quintet brings her visions to life. Her lyrical introspection is also now tinged with self-mocking humour, as in "Damp" when prowling bass, wisps of strings and glints of organ and guitar break down and, like a latter-day Leonard Cohen reborn, she insists: *"I've got a breakdown scheduled in the basement/Baby it's just down these stairs"*. Curiously enticing stuff. ***JOHNNY SHARP***

IAN ALBERT

REVELATIONS

MARIELLE V JAKOBSONS

Making music for – and in – the Bay Area wilderness

MARIELLE V Jakobsons has been a mainstay in the Oakland, California, avant-garde music scene for nearly two decades, both as a solo artist and with projects like Date Palms, darwinsbitch and Saariselka. In 2023, as she was recovering from long Covid, she began to reconsider how and why she makes music. "I was largely housebound, and my new backyard studio became both a refuge and a window into the living environment around me. It's a small haven with large windows that look out onto oak woodland, olive and palm trees, nesting towhees and hummingbirds. This music was made for – not just in – that space."

Drawing on her classical training to restrategise nearly every step of her creative process, Jakobsons gravitated toward just a few instruments – her violin, Moog Matriarch and Fender Rhodes – to create music that conveys all the wonder she felt whenever she looked out of her studio windows. "The process was intentionally simplified, almost stripped back to the bone. When I started listening back to everything I had written, it all suddenly became clear. I realised I had a complete, cohesive album, one that was ready to be mixed and finalised. That moment carried a lot of quiet weight." ***STEPHEN DEUSNER***

CLÉMENTINE MARCH
Powder Keg
PRAH
8/10
French singer charms on freewheeling third

Clémentine March is a Paris-raised, London-based singer-songwriter who's played bass for Snapped Ankles and Rozi Plain and put out a couple of alluring albums five years ago, but her third one, *Powder Keg*, is in a different league altogether. Across a loose and lush Dexys sprawl that sounds like it could fall apart at any moment, March guides her merry band – including Alabaster DePlume on sax and Tapir!'s Evelyn Gray – through disco ("Fireworks"), chanson ("Les Annes") and fuzzy Stereolab power-pop ("Lucie") with McCartney-esque playfulness, to the point where by the final "The Power Of Your Dreams", you'd happily remain in her wild and cosy world. ***PIERS MARTIN***

JEFFREY MARTIN
Alive July 25, 2025 LOOSE
9/10
Fine live double from Portland's Showdown

Martin is such a mesmerising performer that releasing a live double album with only one new song as a follow-up to 2023's exquisitely crafted *Thank God We Left The Garden* is less disappointment than low-key triumph. It's a small club show, captured as it happened; think Townes Van Zandt's *Live At The Old Quarter*. He revisits five songs from the last album and 10 earlier back-catalogue gems, plus a numinous cover of Neil Young's "Out On The Weekend". The richly detailed new song, "1519" – about fanatics and their Conquistador armies pillaging the New World – simmers with allusions to today's American nightmare. ***ALLAN JONES***

PAT METHENY
Side-Eye III+
UNIQUITY MUSIC
7/10
Veteran jazz guitar virtuoso does it again

In an admirable bid never to rest upon the laurels of an eye-watering 20 Grammy awards, Metheny's ongoing Side-Eye project uses a different cast of new and upcoming musicians on each fresh iteration. Backed this time by Chris Fishman on keyboards, Joe Dyson on drums and Jermaine Paul on bass, the latest instalment features eight lengthy original instrumentals, on which his guitar playing is as vibrant and virtuosic as ever – from the sophisticated dinner jazz of "In On It" to the laidback "Urban And Western", with its gospel-funk coda, via the ethereal lyricism of "So Far, So Good" and the furiously dynamic syncopations of "SE-O". ***NIGEL WILLIAMSON***

MIDDLEMAN
Following The Ghost
EVIL SPEAKER
8/10
A homespun, rough-hewn debut

Leaving the listener a fair chunk of change out of half an hour, London quartet Middleman's calling card doesn't hang around, dispatching its grimy, grizzled guitar grooves with precise haste. Precision may not be quite the right word, though, as the template is rooted in the ramshackle sound of early Replacements, the blurrier edges of Big Star and the noisier corners of the Neil Young catalogue. The melodies and instrumentation suggest America, although there's a more British vibe to the lippy punk sneer of singer Noah Alves on "Carry The Lie" and the venomous title track. Pick of the bunch, though, is the eloquent anthem-in-waiting "All But The Flame". ***TERRY STAUNTON***

NOTHING
A Short History Of Decay
RUN FOR COVER
8/10
Philly shoegazers return with powerful and personal statement

Nothing's first album since 2020's *The Great Dismal* maintains the band's desolate mood, with Nicky Palermo drawing on his abusive childhood and ongoing health issues for lyrical and emotional inspiration. The music hovers between Nothing's beautiful, dense shoegaze and more traditional confessional-style indie singer-songwriter, with occasional, disorientating flurries of metal ("Cannibal World") or grubby electronica ("Nerve Scales") – and sometimes metal-tronica ("A Short History Of Decay"). But opener "Never Come Never Morning", propelled by chunky drums and a vulnerable lyric, showcases a more accessible heart and introduces the spirit of openness that sits at the centre of an excellent record. ***PETER WATTS***

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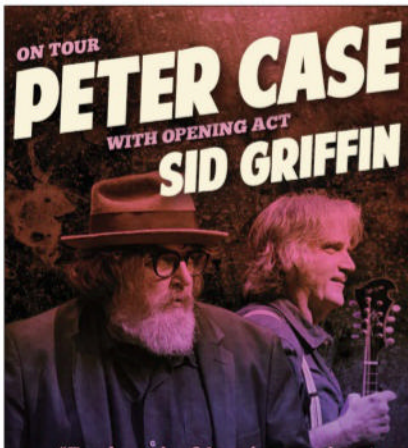

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"Two legends of Americana and roots music bring their rich histories and unparalleled artistry to the stage for one very special show."

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NEW ALBUMS

Lord Jah-Monte Ogbon: all rapped up

NUBIYAN TWIST
Chasing Shadows STRUT
7/10

Fifth album from globally minded UK collective

Tom Excell's band have come to rival Damon Albarn's Africa Express – with which he is also a longtime collaborator – as restless explorers of the interstices where jazz, hip-hop and electronica meet Afrobeat and other global sounds in a joyous communal celebration. With a four-strong horn section driving the tight, punchy arrangements, new full-time vocalist Eniola Idowu adds a slinky jazz-soul vibe heard at its best on the Brazilian-flavoured "Azimuth". Elsewhere a mighty African contingent includes Mali's Fatoumata Diawara, Tanzania's Zawose Queens and Ghanaian rapper MC M.anifest, all of whom thrill in their different ways, while The Pharcyde's Bootie Brown recreates hip-hop's golden age on "Red Herring".

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

DANIEL O'SULLIVAN & RICHARD YOUNGS
Persian Carpets VHF
8/10

Mesmeric, side-long minimalist mantras for piano and zither

On their second collaborative album after 2020's *Twelve Of Hearts*, British underground kindred spirits O'Sullivan and Youngs channel the kind of higher-minded minimalism that the latter also explored back in 1996 on his *Knish* collaboration with Simon Wickham-Smith. There's a similar homeliness to the sound here, of everyday music-making exploded into minimalist mesmerism, with gentle, repetitive piano figures circling around the glittering strings of a zither. The first side is more insistent, the second dazed and meandering, but they share a rapturous beauty that's delicate in its expression but sturdy and convincing in its construction. ***JON DALE***

LORD JAH-MONTE OGBON
As Of Now LEX
7/10

Smart rhymes and jazzy beats from North Carolina rapper

Lord Jah-Monte Ogbon is a keen student of hip-hop, his style honed through exposure to a certain strain of smartly lyrical MCs – think MF Doom, Big Boi, Ghostface Killah. But on his debut LP for Lex, he's in no-one's shadow, his lyrics mining a seam of playful autobiography that is simultaneously self-aggrandising and honest about the life of an indie-rap artist on the come-up. "Flewed Out, All Expenses Is Paid For" shows off his remarkable flow, bobbing and weaving like a bantamweight boxer, while "Texting This Fine Shit For A Month" details the ins and outs of a love affair, while giving his paramour a sardonic voice. It's all wrapped up in a jazzy production that's sweetly nostalgic without feeling played out.

LOUIS PATTISON

SHANE PARISH
Autechre Guitar
PALILALIA
8/10

Fingerstyle guitarist reimagines an IDM institution

It's hard to think of music less obviously translatable to the idiom of acoustic guitar than that of Autechre, the Rochdale electronic duo whose music has long since slipped the yoke of rhythm and melody to explore abstract, textured soundworlds. For Shane Parish, the audacity was presumably part of the appeal. His choices lean towards Autechre's slightly more conventional '90s work; still, this remains a mighty feat of reinvention, clinical IDM reimagined as abstracted Americana. Songs from *Incunabula* and *Amber* are recognisable from their blooming melodies, synth arpeggios transmuted into fast finger flurries. Most impressive is a take on "Corc", which retains the original's peculiar patterning and sense of otherworldly drift.

LOUIS PATTISON

PEACHES
No Lube So Rude
KILL ROCK STARS
6/10

Further filth and fury from the electroclash doyenne

It is pleasing to report that, post-menopause, electro producer Peaches still bangs, in more ways than one. *No Lube So Rude*, her first new album in a decade, drips with fluids, fragrances and various viscera. This "*woman in control of all her holes*" addresses the politics of sex with anger and humour in equal measure, revelling along the way in some fruity rhyming couplets ("*iconic*"/"*colonic*" is the tip of the iceberg). Occasionally, she comes up for air. "Panna Cotta Delight" – probably not an appreciation of Italian desserts – is a more soulful number, and the album climaxes with an unexpected lyrical violin solo.

FIONA SHEPHERD

ISABEL PINE
Fables
KRANKY
7/10

Emotive classical drone from the Canadian wilderness

Isabel Pine's social media presence is five per cent her, and 95 per cent photography of the natural world in her native British Columbia – an indication of where this violinist and composer finds her inspiration. *Fables* unfurls as a series of short and highly atmospheric instrumental pieces inhabiting a space somewhere between refined modern composition, field recording and the sort of nimbus-like drones summoned up by Kranky antecedents like Stars Of The Lid. It would make a perfect soundtrack to traversing chilly landscapes, but an emotional current runs through *Fables* that elevates it beyond mere background music, from the quietly stoic string-saws of "United/Kindled/Waxing" to "Snow", a crystalline synth piece that feels like a glimpse of perfection, as finely wrought as a snowflake under a microscope.

LOUIS PATTISON

KATHERINE PRIDDY
These Frightening Machines
COOKING VINYL
8/10

Third album from Brummie-born folk queen

Priddy's last release found her singing lyrics by poet laureate Simon Armitage, but she has no need of such highbrow collaborators. Her own songs are blessed with emotional literacy and poetic insight, whether she's writing about feminist history or more intimate matters of the heart. The production by Rob Ellis (PJ Harvey, Marianne Faithfull) is richly textured but pushes Priddy's crystalline tones to the fore, most strikingly on the opener "Matches", a spooked exercise in freak folk inspired by ancient witch trials, and centrepiece "Madeleine", on which she duets weightlessly with American singer-songwriter Torres over gossamer strings. It's gripping and gorgeous in equal measure.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

PROSTITUTE
Attempted Martyr
MUTE
8/10

Thrillingly relentless, experi-punk debut

It goes in hard with "All Hail" and a blaring horn clip that suggests a call to prayer – in these times, a provocative statement of identity – before a torrent of sawtoothed guitars, punishing beats and degraded electronic noise pours in. The first from this Michigan quintet is the no-holds-barred account of the experiences of singer and multi-instrumentalist Moe Kazra, "*growing up Arab in Dearborn*". He assumes the character of a religious fanatic in fiery, almost suffocatingly intense songs that churn post-hardcore, noise rock and metal-tipped punk together with sounds sampled from the Middle East to West Africa. No single track grandstands, but the Black Midi-ish epic roil of "Senegal" is a laser-tooled highlight.

SHARON O'CONNELL

NICK SCHOFIELD
Blue Hour
BACKWARD MUSIC
7/10

Montreal electro-acoustic composer dips his toe into smooth jazz

Nick Schofield has distinguished himself in the field of ambient music and electronic synthesis. But *Blue Hour* finds him revisiting a milestone in his past – a teenage epiphany with the dreamy jazz fusion of Miles Davis's *In A Silent Way*. This is nothing like a cover version. Instead, *Blue Hour* pays tribute to *In A Silent Way*'s distinctive soundworld, a quietly mystical space at the boundary of jazz, rock and ambient music. Schofield's drums and synthesiser provide soft motion and cushiony texturing, but key to the enterprise is trumpeter Scott Bevins, whose iridescent improvisations give "Imagine Space" and "Magic Touch" a sense of emotional resonance.

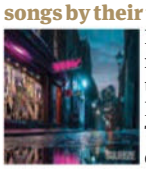
LOUIS PATTISON

JACK MCKAIN

SOFT MACHINE
Thirteen DYAD
7/10
First in eight years from the jazz/prog veterans

The Soft Machine brand pivoted from psychedelic whimsy towards jazz-rock around 50 years ago, by which time all the band's founder members had left. This incarnation features plenty of impressive fusion pyrotechnics from guitarist John Etheridge and saxophonist Theo Travis, but the highlights dig deep into Soft Machine's legacy: the slow-burning improv freakout on "Seven Hours"; the flute-led "Waltz For Robert" (written by drummer Asaf Sirkis for his predecessor, Robert Wyatt); and the Mellotron-assisted Pink Floyd-ish epic "Open Road". Best of all is the hypnotic tribal rock of "Daevid's Special Cuppa", based around a recording of the band's late founder Daevid Allen playinghis trademark glissando guitar. ***JOHN LEWIS***

SQUEEZE
Trixies BMG
8/10
Difford & Tillbrook revisit perky songs by their teenage selves



For the first of two new Squeeze albums this year, Chris Difford and Glenn Tillbrook blow the dust off songs they wrote as teens but never properly performed or recorded until now. Being precocious sorts, the duo actually composed a concept album about the denizens of a fabulous and fictional club called Trixies. Like most juvenilia, the songs here offer glimpses of glories to come amid nods to influences, eg the *Hunky Dory*-isms of "The Place We Call Mars", the Wings-worthy match of pep and pomp in Trixies' two-part title track. With their abundance of charm and good cheer, the performances ensure the patchier numbers still satisfy. More genuinely impressive are "You Get The Feeling" and "Hell On Earth", corkers that demonstrate the creative chemistry that was there since moment one. ***JASON ANDERSON***

THE STUDIO 68! WITH DANI TURNER
Rollin' DETOUR
8/10
Ferocious basement grooves, now with added lungs

Briefly incarnated as Mod revivalists in the early '90s, London's Studio 68! return with full-throated Devonian Dani Turner adding a soulful garage twist. She's Janis Joplin for "Magic Touch"'s opening whirlwind of Hammond organs and pounding drums, and perhaps inevitably Betty Davis on a filthy "Funky People", though calmer amid "Turn Of Your Mind"'s gospel inflections and the hulking "The Way It Is". Age has also lent pragmatism – *"From Camden Town to the Hollywood Bowl"*, Turner howls, illuminating "Need A Miracle" – freeing guitarist and former frontman Paul Moody's rock critic fantasies to thrill convincingly on "Seasons"' windswept psychedelia. ***WYNDHAM WALLACE***

SWELL MAPS
C21 TINY GLOBAL PRODUCTIONS
8/10
Post-punk innovators return for first studio album in 46 years

Swell Maps ended in 1980, with two key members, Epic Soundtracks and Nikki Sudden, since passing away, but now they are back as a new collective. Led by founding member Jowe Head, *C21* features everyone from Luke Haines to Chloe Herington. Their wonky blend of experimental post-punk and avant-rock was a huge influence on groups like Sonic Youth and Stereolab, and here they retain that arresting fusion. "From Head To Phones" is a wiry, urgent and punchy guitar workout, while Haines adds some melodic charm to the fuzzy charge of "Crow Crow". Chaotic, lo-fi and noisy, as well as hook-heavy and poppy, this is a wonderfully rambunctious return. ***DANIEL DYLAN WRAY***

TENDERNESS
True AMORPHOUS SOUNDS
9/10
Pedal steel and excessive screen time contribute to Katy Beth Young's sensual debut

There's a gorgeous simplicity to *True*, the first solo album by Katy Beth Young of indie-poppers Peggy Sue. Young's voice is a key part of that, a beautiful instrument that recalls Jolie Holland, and it is complemented by Harry Bohay on pedal steel, who adds a subtle, sad undercurrent to Young's smart songs about broken hearts and modern dislocation, written in a north London flat. While she draws on country music for emotional support, her concerns are contemporary ("Touchscreen", "Database Blues") and clever ("We'll Always Have Paris 1919", "Playing 'Country Roads'"). ***PETER WATTS***

EMMA TRICCA
Prisms Of Winter – Live In London
BANDCAMP
8/10
Beautiful reimagining of folk singer's rich back catalogue

Emma Tricca's Nick Drake-inspired folk songs have featured on several excellent albums – including 2018's *St Peter* and 2023's *Aspirin Sun*, the latter on Bella Union – and here she reimagines her back catalogue in a more stripped-back style, reflecting her approach as a solo singer. This enhances the delicacy of Tricca's songs and amplifies the magnificent fingerpicking that acts as the through-thread for the album. Live, Tricca has gently evolved the arrangements and adapted her vocal approach, bringing new life to old songs like "Julian's Wings" and transforming others, including "Rubens' House", originally a 10-minute epic but now a song that finds even richer meaning in its fragility. ***PETER WATTS***

ULRIKA SPACEK
EXPO
FULL TIME HOBBY
7/10
London group's fourth dials up the digital

The teenage bonding band for this quintet's two guitarists was Radiohead, and 12 years after their founding, general traces remain – namely, melodic richness and an ear for distinctive outlierism in accessible pop and rock. US have connections to London's Total Refreshment Centre, which maybe explains a loose kinship with Caroline and Soccer96, alongside Sonic Youth, Pavement and MBV. That's not to suggest they're short on ideas: *Expo* grooves, booms and unspools in ways all its own, throwing down fresh surprises as it goes, not least the urgent yet melodious math-jazz of "Picto" and "Weights & Measures", a flare of iridescent post-house with strings and a sudden eruption of fury. ***SHARON O'CONNELL***

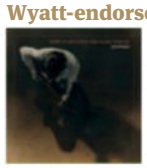
THE WAVE PICTURES
Gained/Lost BELLA UNION
8/10
East Midlands-bred trio honour all our yesterdays

From the cover art homage to *Exile On Main St* to the William Burroughs-inspired lead single "Alice", the references on the latest album from David Tattersall's band tumble over each other like he's auditioning for Radio 4's *This Cultural Life*. Tattersall's songs channel a rich legacy of gnarly garage rock ("You're My Patient Now"), woozy psych ("Faded Wave Pictures T-Shirt") and acid jams ("The Past Comes Back To Haunt Me"), while his protean guitar playing variously evokes the spaced-out fluidity of Jerry Garcia and the more angular lines of Tom Verlaine. As a tutorial in rock'n'roll patrimony, it works a treat. ***NIGEL WILLIAMSON***

JACKIE WEST
SILENT CENTURY
RUINATION
8/10
Brooklyn songwriter reveals a mysterious, poetic world

"Am I a megalomaniac for believing in myself?" Jackie West asks on "Offer". Probably not, though she exhibits wry self-doubt – *"Maybe I didn't invent a computer/I definitely didn't"* – as she swings between spoken meanderings and bursts of melody on the sprawling, 10-minute odyssey that heralded her second album's arrival (and now concludes it) in "Sweet Jane" style. Recalling Julee Cruise, Mazzy Star and Cowboy Junkies on unearthly opener "All Falls Down" and country-tinged torch song "New Moon", she also boasts Liz Phair's edge amid the spartan guitars of "Thunder Ideal", with her haunting voice dominating the economical "Overlooking Glass" and "Course Of Action". ***WYNDHAM WALLACE***

JOE WILKES
Hope In My Chest, Fire In My Throat FRONTLINE
7/10
Fine fifth from the Robert Wyatt-endorsed folkie



For this English singer-songwriter and fingerstyle guitarist, folk must "remind us that the past was a brutal struggle and we are not exempt from its consequences" if it is to remain relevant. Which explains the choice of traditional songs here alongside Wilkes' commanding originals. Born out of recovery from a serious accident and subsequent alcoholism, the set rings true both personally and politically: "Traditional Style" chronicles the life of his grandfather, a blacksmith, while "Hard Times Of Old England" sounds a strikingly pertinent note 50 years after Steeleye Span's recording. Throughout, Wilkes' often daring yet skilful scansion impresses, while his wry humour charms in the Leon Rosselson-styled "A Brief History Of Time". ***SHARON O'CONNELL***

Blowing the dust off: Squeeze in 2025

REISSUES | COMPS | BOXSETS | LOST RECORDINGS

CAROLINA CHOCOLATE DROPS

Genuine Negro Jig (15th Anniversary Edition)

NONESUCH

A landmark black roots release revisited. *By Nigel Williamson*

"WHEN you want genuine music – music that will come right home to you like a bad quarter, suffuse your system like strychnine whisky, and break out on your hide like the pin-feather pimples on a picked goose – invoke the glory-beaming banjo," Mark Twain once wrote.

When he made the comment in 1865, traditional string band music played by black musicians on banjos and fiddles at plantation picnics and sharecropping hoedowns was in its heyday as a vibrant folk tradition mixing European-imported folk-dance tunes with something deeper and earthier that traced its lineage back to Africa.

By the advent of the recording era, though, tastes had changed. There were still a handful of black string bands, such as the Mississippi Sheiks, who made it on to disc in the 1920s and 1930s, but they had become an outlier as the market split along racial lines.

The banjos and fiddles of the old string bands were taken over by white musicians in a style that became known as "hillbilly" and a little later bluegrass, while African-American musicians took up blues, jazz and gospel, sold by white-owned record companies to a black audience as "race music".

REISSUE OF THE MONTH 9/10

There the tradition of old-time American folk music, banjo tunes and minstrel songs played and sung by black musicians might have ended – forgotten and hidden from view, kept alive only by a few ageing back porch musicians in remote rural communities, such as the octogenarian Piedmont fiddler Joe Thompson, who was to become something of a mentor to a trio of young black musicians who in the early years of the new Millennium came together in North Carolina to revive the tradition.

Dom Flemons, Justin Robinson and Rhiannon Giddens met for the first time at a banjo festival in 2005. Known initially as the Sankofa Strings and freely trading banjo, fiddle, guitar, harmonica, bones and jug between the three of them, they soon became the Carolina Chocolate Drops.

Starting out as buskers, they moved on to playing clubs and festival stages, releasing their debut album in 2006. By then the soundtrack to *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* had already sold eight million copies and won a Grammy as album of the year. It showed that there was an audience for old-time music; but its success was also emblematic of how the tradition had been appropriated by white performers. In reasserting the music's black roots, the Carolina Chocolate Drops were coming at the tradition from a different angle, and it felt like a moment of reclamation and revelation.

The renaissance reached its apotheosis on the trio's third

JULIE ROBERTS

Carolina Chocolate Drops in 2008: (l-r) Dom Flemons, Rhiannon Giddens, Justin Robinson

Carolina Chocolate Drops: uniquely genre-busting

studio album and first for Nonesuch, 2010's *Genuine Negro Jig*, which smashed racial stereotypes by topping the bluegrass chart and winning a Grammy as Best Traditional Folk Album.

The contributions of Flemons and Robinson both as singers and multi-instrumentals were essential; but it was Giddens – whose face took central place in the striking oil painting by Jules Arthur on the album's cover – who emerged as the group's show-stopping star.

There are cultural commentators who will tell you that Beyoncé is the most important female artist in African-American music since Aretha Franklin. However, there's another school of thought which suspects the accolade might belong to Giddens.

A conservatoire-trained opera singer turned agent of social change, in her post-Carolina Chocolate Drops solo career, Giddens would go on to create a dazzling, multi-faceted body of work in which influences from the blues of Memphis Minnie and the black folk traditions of Elizabeth Cotten and Odetta to the soul-jazz of Nina Simone and the gospel righteousness of Sister Rosetta Tharpe have been synthesised into something uniquely genre-busting and transcendent.

But it was on *Genuine Negro Jig* that her generous, expansive vision of African-American roots music began to take mature shape as Giddens and her bandmates vividly reimagined the heritage of old-time string band music in thrilling fashion, using tradition not as a jailer but as a guide, a lodestar by which to navigate on their own journey of discovery, exuberantly honouring the legacy of those whose contributions to black musical history had been overlooked or erased.

Much of the repertoire such as "Cornbread And Butterbeans", "Trouble In Your Mind" and "Cindy Gal", a dance tune learnt from Thompson, came from the world of 19th- and early 20th-century minstrel shows, vernacular folk tunes and string bands. Crucially, though, it was played and sung with a raucous and raunchy spirit which meant it never sounded remotely like a dry and academic history lesson.

Yet there was more to it than that. The album also found Giddens the modern-day blues mama reinventing Blu Cantrell's 2001 R&B hit "Hit 'Em Up Style" as an irresistible vaudeville stomp, Flemons transporting Tom Waits' "Trampled Rose" back to the "old, weird America" of Appalachian myth and Robinson showing his worth as an original songwriter with the spooked ballad "Kissin' And Cussin'", complete with haunting autoharp.

This 15th-anniversary reissue is augmented by nine previously unreleased tracks, not all drawn from the original *Genuine Negro Jig* sessions but from different phases of the group's early years. Nevertheless, they could easily make a fine album in their own right.

"Avalon" is an original composition featuring the keening voices of Giddens and Robinson duetting over a droning fiddle and echoing frame drum, while "Georgie Buck" is a reprise of a song from their first album, made fruity by Flemons' jug blowing.

Blind Willie Johnson's gospel-blues "City Of Refuge" is powerfully sung by Flemons with exquisite harmonies from Giddens while the trad "Jack O'Diamonds" is rendered as a three-part round over Giddens' solo fiddle and "Here Rattler" is a Robinson showcase about coon dog hunting, sung with a grin as broad as the great wide yonder.

"Bring It Home" rides a furious 'fife and drum' groove that brought the house down as a live favourite, "Little Rabbit" is a breakneck fiddle duet with harmonica and washboard with which they opened gigs for many years and "Memphis Shakedown", originally recorded by the Memphis Jug Band in 1934, finds an uninhibited Giddens going gloriously berserk on kazoo.

Genuine Negro Jig was the last album made by the original trio. Robinson left the following year and Leyla McCalla joined for one final album, 2012's *Leaving Eden*. By 2014, Giddens was the only remaining member of the original lineup and although there was no official announcement that they had broken up, as she launched her solo career, it seemed that the Chocolate Drops were no more.

Yet never say never. Out of the blue last year Giddens, Flemons and Robinson unexpectedly reunited for a one-off performance as the Carolina Chocolate Drops at the Biscuits & Banjos Festival in Durham, North Carolina, conceived as a 20th-anniversary commemoration of the festival which had first brought them together.

It was a joyous reunion, not least because in the intervening two decades the Chocolate Drops had inspired a new generation of young roots stars to explore a hitherto forgotten heritage of black acoustic music, including Amythyst Kiah, Jerron "Blind Boy" Paxton and Jake Blount, who has hailed *Genuine Negro Jig* as launching perhaps the most significant folk revival since the heyday of Greenwich Village in the early 1960s.

"The Carolina Chocolate Drops single-handedly snatched black string band tradition from the jaws of extinction," enthused Blount to WMOT in 2020. "To learn the style as well as they did – and they took it worldwide and to bigger stages than it had ever seen – that's a huge deal. I don't know a single black person who came to the music in my generation who doesn't see them as having brought them in."

SLEEVE NOTES

1 Peace Behind The Bridge
2 Trouble In Your Mind
3 Your Baby Ain't Sweet Like Mine
4 Hit 'Em Up Style
5 Cornbread And Butterbeans
6 Snowden's Jig (Genuine Negro Jig)
7 Why Don't You Do Right?
8 Cindy Gal
9 Kissin' And Cussin'
10 Sandy Boys
11 Reynadine
12 Trampled Rose
13 Avalon
14 Georgie Buck
15 City Of Refuge (2025 Remaster)
16 Will Adams Breakdown
17 Jack O' Diamonds
18 Bring It Home
19 Here Rattler
20 Little Rabbit
21 Memphis Shakedown (2025 Mix)

Produced by: Joe Henry
Released: February 16, 2010

RECOMMENDER

DROPPING OUT

The pick of Flemons, Giddens and Robinson's work outside the Carolina Chocolate Drops

DOM FLEMONS
Black Cowboys
SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS, 2018
Flemons' third solo album explored the history of African-Americans in the Old West via country blues, field hollers, square-dances and campfire singalongs. Who knew "Home On The Range" was first recorded by a black bartender in Texas? Flemons' passionate relationship with his material lends a vibrancy that means it never sounds merely like an historical exercise. **8/10**

RHIANNON GIDDENS
Freedom Highway
NONESUCH, 2017
Giddens' second solo album swerved the tendency of roots music to romanticise "the old weird America" and elucidated the African-American experience on a set of mostly original compositions that took us on a starkly compelling journey from slavery down the freedom highway to the Civil Rights era and on to the Black Lives Matter movement. **9/10**

RHIANNON GIDDENS & JUSTIN ROBINSON
What Did The Blackbird Say To The Crow
NONESUCH, 2025
Teaming up together on record for the first time since *Genuine Negro Jig*, the duo fashioned a joyous homage to old-time music with 18 banjo and fiddle songs and instrumentals, taped in the open air in the style of a pre-war field recording with the crickets and birds chirping in the background. **8/10**

JULIE ROBERTS

Q&A

Rhiannon Giddens: "We weren't just copyists"

"We were apprentices": Giddens with CCD in 2008

Can we go back to the beginning of the Chocolate Drops and that first, groundbreaking black banjo festival in 2005. How do you remember that and what was its significance? It was the flashpoint. There are moments in your life that act as crossroads and that's one of them. It's where I met Dom and Justin and it's the reason I'm here talking to you. As a person of colour interested in banjo music you were part of a very small company. It was the beginning of my understanding and it's really the first line of my bio.

You were a classically trained opera singer, so how had you discovered and got interested in the traditional music of the black string bands in the first place? I got into it via contra dancing, which is a descendant of English country dancing and is an American social community thing. When I left college, I was feeling burnt out from the classical world and I started going to these contra dance weekends with live bands playing for the dancers. That's where I first heard old-time banjo music and there would be stalls selling CDs and I started collecting them.

Joe Thompson is very much seen as the band's mentor in the early years. Tell us a little about him... Joe was 86 when we first met him and he came from a tradition in which music was not a profession but part of the fabric of life and which had almost disappeared. He worked in a furniture factory and he learnt the music from his father who had learnt from his father and so on back to the time of slavery.

And you learnt the old tunes and styles from him? We were his apprentices and received his tradition. His family hadn't taken up the music so he was very excited that we wanted to learn from him. He was happy to teach anyone, but it was huge for him that he could pass the music down to young black people like us. He's why we could do what we did. We had a lineage. We weren't just copyists. We received the tradition in a very deep way.

The *O Brother*... soundtrack showed there was a market for old-time music but at the same time illustrated how it had been taken over by white musicians – so it was a felicitous moment for you to come along and say, 'Wait a minute, there's an African-American aspect to this story which is being erased'? Timing is everything and we were in the right place at the right time with the right story. *O Brother* ... blew the doors off for a lot of people but the movie reinforced the old stereotypes of some pure white mystical heritage. We had an opportunity to show another place where the music came from.

Flemons, Giddens and Robinson at the 2007 Hudson River Festival, with Sule Greg Wilson guesting on tambourine

***Genuine Negro Jig* was the album that put you on the map. How did it differ from the earlier albums – did it feel like the culmination of what you had set out to do?** The magical thing about it was that a lot things came together. Nonesuch is a great label and Joe Henry was a great producer and the three of us in the band were so different – Dom was the songster, I was the singer who did all this other stuff and Justin had the repertoire. We had come so close to losing the tradition and we were making a concerted effort to make this music visible again.

What is striking is how vibrant and fresh the album sounds. You were all musical archaeologists in a way and a lot of research went in to unearthing a hidden musical history. But there's no sense of an academic exercise. We were performers who were academically curious rather than the other way round. That was important. There's a lot of nostalgia in white Americana for a better, simpler yesterday but that's a lot more complicated in the black community for obvious reasons. We weren't pretending it was 1865 or 1934. We were entertainers working in the moment and we were looking forward as well as honouring and celebrating the past.

Which is presumably why you covered "Hit 'Em Up Style" as if it was a traditional tune? That came out of doing shows for kids in schools. They'd look at us like, 'Why should we be interested in fiddles and banjos?' So we did some old songs and then said, "What if we did a song that you know?"

Did the success of the album take you by surprise? It did. It exploded and it felt surreal at the Grammies. None of us were in it to be rich or famous. We wanted to be full-time musicians which was a different function from people like Joe [Thompson] and we worked like dogs and were on the road all the time. But it was a mission – a service to the culture. We didn't care if we won. What mattered was that we made the music visible.

People like Jake Blount have said you inspired a folk revival among young black performers. How aware are you of that? The first time I realised was when I met Amythyst Kiah and she said what an important part the Chocolate Drops had played in her musical upbringing. That made me feel old but it was very gratifying. All we wanted was to be a link in the chain. We weren't the first link and we definitely didn't want to be the last. ***INTERVIEW: NIGEL WILLIAMSON***

"It felt surreal to be at the Grammys"
RHIANNON GIDDENS

JULIE ROBERTS; JACK VARTOOGIAN/GETTY IMAGES

Underdogs: The Beach Boys in 1977, a reluctantly returning Brian keeping a low profile

MAX AGUILERA-HELLWEG

THE BEACH BOYS

We Gotta Groove: The Brother Studio Years UME

8/10

Reunited with its troubled leader, an American pop institution attempts to meet the challenges of a new era. *By Jason Anderson*

FOR the Beach Boys and everyone around them, the year of 1976 was about putting an upbeat face on a situation that should've elicited very different feelings. Hence the marketing campaign that trumpeted "Brian Is Back!", a slogan that celebrated the return of the architect of the band's greatest triumphs after years of struggles.

More disconcerting was watching a man who'd long ago retreated from public view get thrust in front of cameras and onto stages. Brian's worst humiliation arrived in *The Beach Boys: It's OK!*, a TV special whose title reeked of the same forced good cheer. In one segment, John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd played cops who barged into Brian's home and charged him with offences including "failing to surf". After being hauled off to the beach, the bearded recluse – so afraid of the ocean, he'd never learned to surf – gamely hit the waves alongside the *Saturday Night Live* stars. Sloshing around in a green bathrobe, Wilson looks as you'd expect: scared, bewildered and not a little pissed off.

The stunt helped promote *15 Big Ones*, the first Beach Boys album to solely credit him as producer since *Pet Sounds*. It was also the first of the band's albums to be recorded at Brother, the studio they established in Santa Monica in 1974. Since Wilson's participation in new Beach Boys recordings was a condition in the Reprise deal, the band had struggled to keep him working. When the 1974 compilation *Endless Summer* landed them back on top of the charts and boosted their draw as a touring act, it became even more imperative to have Brian "back", regardless of whether he was in any condition to be there.

All that barely begins to suggest the fraught circumstances that sometimes impact the music on *We Gotta Groove: The Brother Studio Years*, the latest archival release to explore The Beach Boys' rocky yet often fruitful era through the 1970s. Newcomers to this saga can refer to 2021's *Feel Flows: The Sunflower & Surf's Up Sessions 1969-1971* and 2022's *Sail On Sailor – 1972* to get up to speed. But even ardent Beach Boys scholars may be left seasick by their attempts to follow the band's journey across the highs and lows of these particular turbulent waters.

By the time Belushi and Aykroyd kicked him out of bed, Wilson had already been remarkably busy by his standards. After a few false starts and enough internal rancour to justify the album's working title of 'Group Therapy', most of *15 Big Ones* was completed in the first half of 1976. One major sign of Wilson's increased presence was the prominence of his Moog and ARP synthesizers, utilised partially to replace time-consuming sessions with string players. Though the band initially focused on covers to warm up the musicians and defuse conflicts between songwriters

over whose songs to use, the versions of oldies like "Rock And Roll Music" came to outnumber the originals on the final product. A few more covers – including a garish "On Broadway" – surface among the *15 Big Ones* outtakes and alternative mixes on the last disc of *We Gotta Groove*.

Given the hodgepodge nature of the first release marking Wilson's return, it's not surprising the set devotes more attention to the two much more interesting albums that followed. Or rather, there would've been two had the commercial failure of *The Beach Boys Love You* in 1977 not prompted Reprise to cancel plans for *Adult/Child*, thereby ensuring the latter's status as the second most mythic of The Beach Boys' lost albums.

As was the case with the 21st-century incarnations of *Smile*, the circulation of *Adult/Child*'s contents via bootlegs undercuts *We Gotta Groove*'s significance as the host of the album's first official iteration. Likewise, its greatest song – the achingly beautiful "Still I Dream Of You", which appeared on the *Good Vibrations* set in 1993 – and its most execrable – "Hey Little Tomboy", a lowlight of 1978's *M.I.U. Album* but thankfully excluded here – have long been available, too.

Yet the opportunity to behold such a comprehensive survey of Wilson's artistry even in this compromised state can be both startling and staggering. That's especially true of *The Beach Boys Love You*, an album that's packed with deeply odd, synth-laden ditties about smooth-rolling sweeties ("Roller Skating Child"), super-cool talk-show hosts ("Johnny Carson"), and astronomical discoveries ("Solar System"). The vocals-only versions of "The Night Was So Young" and "Let's Put Our Hearts Together" and other demos emphasise the songs' childlike spirit of joy and invention. The album's most ardent defenders – like Peter Buck and Brian, too – become easier to believe, though those who call it The Beach Boys' punk record go a step too far.

The same capacity for wonder and whimsy marks the forays into big-band balladry on *Adult/Child*. Disappointed when Frank Sinatra declined to record any of his offerings, Wilson and arranger Dick Reynolds concocted a swing suite that feels like a wonderfully wobbly counterpart to *In The Wee Small Hours*.

The group's other songwriters get chances to shine, too. A song that Dennis Wilson failed to finish for *Pacific Ocean Blue*, "Holy Man" appears here with a gorgeous, mostly wordless vocal by Carl. An instrumental early incarnation of Carl's "Angel Come Home" – later finished for 1979's *L.A.* – is ready for a yacht cruise. Then there's "We Gotta Groove", a *Love You* outtake whose chugging rhythm and downpitched vocal harmonies epitomise the band's zigzagging creative impulses through a very weird time. "*We can groove it on this waaayyvvve*", they sing, the voices rising up as if to support poor Brian as he thrashes in the waves with Belushi. So maybe he's waving and not drowning after all.

SLEEVE NOTES

THE BEACH BOYS LOVE YOU (1977 Mix) LP1
1 Let Us Go On This Way
2 Roller Skating Child
3 Mona
4 Johnny Carson
5 Good Time
6 Honkin' Down The Highway
7 Ding Dang
8 Solar System
9 The Night Was So Young
10 I'll Bet He's Nice
11 Let's Put Our Hearts Together
12 I Wanna Pick You Up
13 Airplane
14 Love Is A Woman

Love You Outtakes (CD Only)
15 Ruby Baby
16 Marilyn Rovell
17 Sherry She Needs Me
18 Lazy Lizzie
19 We Gotta Groove (2025 Mix)
20 Hey There Mama (2025 Mix)
21 Clangin' (2025 Mix)
22 Love Is A Woman (Al Jardine Vocal)
23 Johnny Carson (Alt Mix With Intro)
24 You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling

ADULT/CHILD SESSIONS LP2
1 Life Is For The Living
2 Deep Purple
3 It's Over Now
4 Still I Dream Of It
5 Everybody Wants To Live
6 Lines
7 It's Trying To Say
8 Shortenin' Bread
9 New England Waltz
10 Life Is For The Living (Backing Track)
11 Deep Purple (2025 Backing Track Mix)
12 It's Over Now (2025 Backing Track Mix)
13 Still I Dream Of It (2025 Backing Track Mix)

1974-1977 Select Outtakes (CD Only)
14 Holy Man (2025 Mix Carl Wilson Vocal)
15 Carl's Song 1 (It Could Be Anything) (2025 Mix)
16 Carl's Song 2 (Angel Come Home) (2025 Mix)
17 String Bass Song (Rainbows) (2025 Mix)
18 10,000 Years Ago
19 Gimme Some Lovin' (2025 Mix)
20 Honeycomb (Marilyn Wilson-Rutherford Vocal)
21 In The Back Of My Mind (1975 Alternate Take 2025 Mix)

15 BIG ONES OUTTAKES AND ALTERNATE MIXES LP3
1 Just Once In My Life (2025 Mix)
2 Mony, Mony (2025 Mix)
3 Running Bear (2025 Mix)
4 Shake, Rattle And Roll
5 On Broadway (2025 Mix)
6 Sea Cruise (2025 Mix)
7 Chapel Of Love (2025 Mix)
8 Short Skirts (2025 Mix)
9 TM Song (2025 Backing Track Mix)
10 Rock And Roll Music (2025 Backing Track Mix)
11 Had To Phone Ya (2025 Deconstructed Mix)
12 Just Once In My Life (2025 Backing Track Mix)

Love You Alternate Mixes (CD Only)
13 Let Us Go On This Way (Alternate Mix)
14 Mona (2025 Deconstructed Mix)
15 Honkin' Down The Highway (Billy Hinsche Vocal)
16 Ding Dang (Session Highlights and Unedited 2025 Mix)
17 Solar System (2025 Backing Track Mix)
18 The Night Was So Young (2025 Vocals Only Mix)
19 Let's Put Our Hearts Together (2025 Coda Mix)

Love You Brian Cassette Demos (CD Only)
20 That Special Feeling (Demo)
21 It's Over Now (Demo)
22 They're Marching Along (Demo)
23 Love Is A Woman (Demo)
24 Mona (Demo)
25 Airplane (Demo)
26 Let's Put Our Hearts Together (Demo)
27 I'll Bet He's Nice (Demo)
28 Still I Dream Of It (Demo)

Brian Wilson's artistry can still be both startling and staggering

AtoZ

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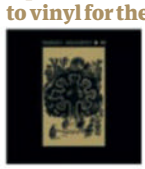
TORI AMOS
Strange Little Girls (reissue, 2001)
RHINO
7/10
Her typically unorthodox jukebox favourites

When you need to deliver a contract-fulfilling album to get out of a record deal, a set of paint-by-numbers covers is a conventional kiss-off. Yet Tori Amos was never one to do anything quite so boringly predictable, so she gave her collection a twist. Released in 2001, *Strange Little Girls* came in six different album sleeves, each featuring Amos dressed as a different character inspired by the songs. The selection inside was equally surprising, with covers of songs by Eminem and Slayer alongside more conventionally canonical fare such as "Heart Of Gold", "I Don't Like Mondays" and "Happiness Is A Warm Gun", all skewed from their original male points of view.

Extras: 7/10. The original dozen songs are here augmented by a version of David Bowie's "After All" and a terrific take on Alice Cooper's "Only Women Bleed", both of which were B-sides, and previously unheard versions of Elvis Costello's "Hoover Factory" and Bruce Springsteen's "Growin' Up". ***NIGEL WILLIAMSON***

NANJO ASAHITO
M (reissue, 1996)
BLACK EDITIONS
8/10
Outsider torch songs from Japanese luminary, pressed to vinyl for the first time



Nanjo Asahito was behind some of Japan's most out-there rock music of the 1990s – pioneering groups like High Rise and Mainliner, who combined volume and feedback to create a scorching, lightning-crack psychedelia. But *M* finds Asahito in a very different mode. Originally released on cassette by his own La Musica Records, it compiles a series of sparse solo compositions for voice, electric guitar and piano that Asahito put to tape in the '80s. Gentle, mysterious and introspective to the point of isolationist, these five songs explore a twilit songcraft that sounds hermetically sealed

BRMC: a convincing reinvention

from the outside world. A blend of lo-fi production and obscurantist tendencies can make a song like "Eucharist" somewhat difficult to parse. But in places, this music feels remarkably prescient. "Unsteady Afternoon" anticipates the slowcore of Low or Galaxie 500, while "Inner Beast" – '60s beat balladry viewed through a veil of mist – hits similar buttons to the last Cindy Lee record, and is every bit as good. ***LOUIS PATTISON***

ANDREW BIRD
The Mysterious Production Of Eggs: 20th Anniversary Boxset
WEGAWAM MUSIC CO
8/10
Expanded reissue of Bird's wry, beguiling 2005 breakthrough

A curious derring-do has always driven Andrew Bird's music. He bows and plucks his violin, strums it like an electric guitar, loops it in real time, then adds an acrobatic whistle that sounds like a theremin and a vocal with a weapons-grade deadpan. All of those tricks and techniques collide beautifully on his 2005 breakthrough *The Mysterious Production Of Eggs*, which brought new sounds into the indie mainstream along with a wryness that suggested Aimee Mann and McSweeney's in equal measure. Songs like the conspiratorial "A Nervous Tic Motion Of The Head To The Left" and the Pynchon-namedropping "Capital I" chronicle mundane maladies like life and death, while "The Happy Birthday Song" practically begs someone to wish him many happy returns.
Extras: 8/10. Somehow the live cuts are even weirder and wryer, certainly looser, while the rarities and lavishly illustrated booklet courtesy of longtime collaborator Jay Ryan enlarge his weird widescreen vision of postmillennial America.
STEPHEN DEUSNER

BLACK REBEL MOTORCYCLE CLUB
Howl (reissue, 2005) PIAS
7/10
Californians' stripped-down third album

After briefly becoming the toast of the skinny jean-wearing classes in the early 2000s with their debut album, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club fell out with each other, their label and the music press after a less impressive follow-up, and this third outing can be seen as them deciding everything must go. Out went the fuzz-rock riffs and crunching backbeats, replaced by acoustic country-blues and meditative moods. And while it still won't raise the pulse rates of 2020s listeners like their high-octane early hits, it remains a convincing reinvention, not least when they get all "Jesus"-evoking, Spiritualized-style, on "Gospel Song". Elsewhere, "Fault Line" is a haunting acoustic vignette, and the harmonica-honking, bluegrass-stomping "Ain't No Easy Way" offers tantalising echoes of former, harder-rocking glories.
Extras: 6/10. The tidy 2006 "Howl Sessions" EP that doubled down on the same style, along with a handful of fleetingly diverting demos.
JOHNNY SHARP

JEFF BUCKLEY
The Complete Live At Sin-é (reissue, 2003) CMG
7/10
Exhaustive pre-*Grace* solo set back on vinyl

The first sound here is Sin-é's coffee machine percolating in the laidback East Village venue where the unknown Buckley first honed his music. Originally a 1993 EP calling card, "Live At Sin-é" was expanded by two hours in 2003, debuting on vinyl for Record Store Day 2018 in a box set reissued here. Heard at such length, the goofy, self-deprecating singer confounds his posthumous mystique. Much like Aretha at the piano, his vocal flights depend on the earthing rhythm of his Telecaster, calibrating his crest and glide. Buckley's nascent songwriting provides intensely committed highlights, but the myriad cover versions flex and form his voice. He sounds callow aping his hero Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, whose example is better integrated into Van songs that suggest a less improvisatory model, as a gently exultant "Sweet Thing" finds the hushed heart of its *"misty garden wet with rain"*, and lives there awhile. This is a realistic snapshot of Buckley before he was transfigured by death: halfway through his scant five-year career, sometimes gauche, sometimes expanding into wide open realms. ***NICK HASTED***

J DILLA
Donuts (reissue, 2006)
STONES THROW
9/10
Historic hip-hop timewarps on high-end vinyl

Donuts' composition – between hospital treatments for the rare diseases that eventually killed Dilla in 2006 – has attached a myth of tragic heroism to its valedictory, time-bending properties. Beats define Dilla's legacy, his jazzy, off-kilter personalisation of the drum machine and sampler revolutionising hip-hop and beyond, but *Donuts*' ambitions are more total. Micro-tunes lasting a minute or so infinitely loop back to opener "Donuts (Outro)", and generous samples of soul and funk records ferried to his bedside offer a bittersweet utopian vision of broken Detroit, with Motown kings including Smokey enlisted and horns, strings and harmonies slicing against muffled beats. It could be a vivid, gospel death-dream of city and self. From "Geek Down"'s looped horror strings and fat wah-wah to "The Factory"'s squeaking, neurotic sex jam, this was hip-hop ferrying black American heritage into the future, warmed by nostalgia yet like nothing before. *Donuts* is a fitting, murkily shifting last testament, looking back to *Bitches Brew* and ahead to his compadre D'Angelo's own swansong, *Black Messiah*.
NICK HASTED

SLIM DUNLAP
Every Little Word CURATION
7/10
Repackaging of Replacements guitarist's mid-'90s solo albums

Slim Dunlap was the guitarist drafted to replace the chronically unruly Bob Stinson for what turned out to be The Replacements' final two albums, *Don't Tell A Soul* and *All Shook Down*, both melancholy masterpieces. Dunlap's subsequent solo albums, compiled here – *The Old New Me* and *Times Like This* – are released by way of posthumous tribute: Dunlap, who was incapacitated by a stroke in 2012, died in 2024. Somewhat ironically, these records have perhaps more in common with the convulsive yelping of earlier Replacements, foregrounding Dunlap's signature Keith Richards-like chug, and revealing a droll lyrical sensibility that illuminates his connection with Paul Westerberg. "Rockin' Here Tonight", "Busted Up" and "Hate This Town" all sound – as did many of Westerberg's own solo songs – like the work of someone wearily aware of how good this stuff is, and how few people will listen.
Extras: 8/10. Demos, alternate versions, live recordings.
ANDREW MUELLER

TILAYE GEBRE
Tilaye's Saxophone With The Dahlak Band MUZIKAWI
7/10
Unique 1970s recordings of Ethio-jazz tenor saxophonist

Saxophonist Tilaye Gebre is a leading light from the 1970s golden age of Ethiopian jazz, when he played in the Wallias Band and accompanied the singer Mahmoud Ahmed. These recordings with his Dahlak Band come from the turbulent years of 1975 and 1976, just as Ethiopia's new Marxist government was closing Addis Ababa's hotels and music venues. Gebre's breathy tenor tone invokes Stan Getz, but his improvisations use the distinctive Amharic pentatonic scales typical of Ethio-jazz. "Feqresh Yemench Weha" is a wonderfully creepy piece of minor-key swing, "Alibek'agnimi" is a rather lovely waltz, and "Tizita" sees him improvising with a heavy vibrato over a shimmering, organ-led R&B ballad. Most intriguing are the flirtations with Jamaican music – "Anichi Keto Gidi Yeleshimi" sees Gebre switching to alto sax for a slice of reverb-drenched reggae, while both "Alichalikumi" and "Tizi Alegni Yet'initu" see him riffing over some appealingly curious dub-funk grooves. ***JOHN LEWIS***

HAWKWIND
Hawkwind (Deluxe Boxset) CHERRY RED
8/10
Four-disc edition of cosmic overlords' first dispatch

Hawkwind's early mission, as outlined on the sleeve of their striking 1970 debut, was to levitate minds "in a nice way, without acid..." Dave Brock's Ladbroke Grove renegades hit on a deeply experimental sound that fed from avant-jazz and psychedelia, but whose primitive charge would also come to inform punk. Produced by The Pretty Things' Dick Taylor, *Hawkwind* is essentially an intense freeform jam bookended by ragged folk anthem "Hurry On Sundown" and the cold awakening of "Mirror Of Illusion", both of which urge people to search within for the answers to life's big questions. A disquieting rumble of guitars, sax and Dik Mik's oscillator effects, the whole thing still feels strangely powerful.
Extras: 7/10. Early demos, including Pink Floyd's "Cymbaline" and Brock's solo version of Willie Dixon standard "Bring It On Home", plus album remixes by Stephen W Tayler and rare live cuts from 1970.

KENSCHLES

"*Higher!*" exorts Brock on the freaky "Paranoia". ***ROB HUGHES***

ANDREW HILL
Compulsion!!!!!
(reissue, 1967) BLUE NOTE
9/10
Vital set of '60s avant-garde jazz

Pianist and composer Andrew Hill's mid-'60s period for Blue Note provided one of the label's richest yet most underrated group of albums. *Compulsion!!!!!*, recorded in 1965 and released two years later, is especially compelling, four compositions rooted in Hill's desire to write music that expressed the legacy of the African-American tradition while tapping into the percussive elements of the piano. This is clear from the impassioned opening notes, Hill's approach to his instrument a uniquely rhythmic avant-garde attack. The ensemble includes tenor saxophonist John Gilmore in one of his rare appearances outside the Sun Ra universe, his brilliant, wandering saxophone dipping in and out of pure free jazz. Trumpeter Freddie Hubbard stands out too, particularly on the adventurous title track and the dark yet engaging "Premonition", providing a hint of classic bop to balance out Hill's abstract explorations. Throughout, African instruments like the kalimba and conga drums add gorgeous textures to this dense music. ***ANA GAVRILOVSKA***

THE HOUSE OF LOVE
The House Of Love
(reissue, 1988) CHERRY RED
9/10
Welcome double-vinyl reissue for indie touchstone

Released in May 1988, between albums by The Weather Prophets and Felt, The House Of Love's debut was the last hurrah for '80s indie classicism – melody, romance, interior lives – before My Bloody Valentine's *Isn't Anything* shifted the focus to texture, abstraction and volume. Opening with the coruscating single "Christine", the album balanced Guy Chadwick's songwriting, steeped in longing, regret and emotional vulnerability, against the thrilling melodrama of Terry Bickers' guitar lines. Witness the way the wistful "Love In A Car" suddenly explodes into the chorus, the breathless urgency of "Salome" or the swaggering chords of "Sulphur" – Bickers' guitar is restless and inventive, just as Chadwick provided mysterious, introspective musings on lost innocence and lost love.

Huggy Bear: Brighton's '90s indie rioters return

"*I feel just like yesterday's boy*", he sang on "Love In A Car" – a prescient observation, considering what was to come just a few months later. But *The House Of Love* captures a perfect moment, perfectly.
Extras: 9/10. Two LPs on transparent vinyl, with the second collecting all the Creation-era singles and their B-sides. ***MICHAEL BONNER***

HUGGY BEAR
Basic Strategies For Going Out JABS
8/10
Fierce Peel Sessions from undervalued '90s punks

Noisy agitators Huggy Bear withdrew from the music scene in 1994, emerging only recently with the release of *Killed (Of Kids)*, a biography, when three of the original members performed a handful of Huggy Bear songs at the book launch. Now comes *Basic Strategies For Going Out*, a coruscating compilation of two Peel Sessions the band recorded in 1992 and 1993 – "the first Huggy Bear recording issued since 1994, and at present their only commercially available release", the label proudly proclaims. The set includes a thrilling version of their boy-girl revolutionary anthem for an alternative '90s, "Her Jazz", as well as wild takes of rarities like "Teen Tighterns", "Limit 2 Surf", "Steppin On Bugs" and the Sonic Youth-worshipping "Hopscorch". There are also a couple of songs that were not otherwise recorded for Huggy Bear's confusing discography of singles and EPs – the frantic "You Don't" and more elastic "Our Voltage". ***PETER WATTS***

REDISCOVERED
Uncovering the underrated and overlooked

BEGGAR WEEDS
Tragedy In US History
STROLLING BONES
8/10
Unsung Florida trio reissue their small catalogue, featuring Michael Stipe

THE Beggar Weeds were three young men from Jacksonville, Florida, who spent their early twenties touring the country and making sense of a cockeyed world. That makes them no different from thousands of other underground bands of the late 1980s and early 1990s, but they made that quest for meaning the foundation for their small catalogue – just a dozen or so recorded songs that sound as edgy and cathartic now as they did 30 years ago. On "Graduating", a coming-of-age rumination with an excitable beat and pinprick guitars, they struggle to reconcile their rootless rock'n'roll existence with the roles they're expected to play. "*I got a job working with my brother, my daddy*", guitarist-bassist Scott Leuthold sings in his gloriously wounded bleat. "*We've got a band/They've been waiting for me/But it feels like something's lacking*".

Finding that something lacking was their aim for roughly seven years, during which they toured constantly and recorded sparsely. Named after an offbeat museum in the band's hometown – which boasted Elvis Presley's will and Jayne Mansfield's death car in its collection – this revelatory new compilation gathers the contents from that EP along with six unreleased tracks co-produced by Beggar Weeds superfan Michael Stipe. It shows the search was always more important than any answer they could possibly uncover.

The group, which also included drummer Alan Cowart and guitarist-bassist Adam Watson, gravitated towards the weird, the disregarded, the disreputable. They wrote songs about admiring the neighbourhood hoarders ("Linden & Mary") and finding beauty at the local garbage dump ("Sunbeam Mountain"), but they also wrote about their antipathy toward organised religion ("Churchin'") and their disgust at everyday racism ("Daddy's Little Angel"). As a band they were deeply odd and deeply Southern, grounded in punk and twang as though connecting the dots between the Allman Brothers and The Minutemen.

Their rambunctious live shows, along with their gritty, self-released 1987 EP "Sure Pants Alot", won them fans around the South, including Stipe. He invited the band to Athens, Georgia, where they cut a handful of songs with the REM frontman and John Keane (Uncle Tupelo, Vic Chesnutt). With their wiry energy and inventive rhythms, "Seer" and "Elizabeth" could have been pre-Nirvana college-rock staples, while "Picolata" might have endeared them to the alt.country crowd, but the songs from those sessions were never released. The band had trouble securing a label deal and sputtered to a breakup in 1992, although they've reunited at various points over the years. *Tragedy In US History* is anything but a tragedy, however. For a band that could easily have been more than obscure, it's a celebration of three young men taking on the world, as though the Beggar Weeds lasted just long enough to usher them into adulthood. ***STEPHEN DEUSNER***

Beggar Weeds: taking on the world

LIANE HENTSCHER; PATRICK O'BRIEN

THE MAGNOLIA ELECTRIC CO
Hard To Love A Man
SECRETLY CANADIAN
7/10
Twentieth-anniversary expansion of EP into LP deepens Jason Molina's rueful legacy

Jason Molina's switch from Songs: Ohia to The Magnolia Electric Co began with the former's last LP introducing its successor's name, and 2005 saw live and studio albums before the "Hard To Love A Man" EP, doubled in length here with related demos. Molina's gorgeous fatalism starts with the title track's relationship requiem: "*Goodbye was half the words ya knew/While you was waiting for me not to call*". Hallucinatorily woozy steel guitar and the low end's brooding shudder leave nowhere to run. "Doing Something Wrong"'s doomed declaration that "*I have got my shit together, and I am ready to go*" is aced by "31 Seasons In The Minor Leagues" (formerly "Tonight I'm So Down"): "*And everything you ever looked up to, is now looking down on you*". The lugubrious acoustic demo deepens the debt to *On The Beach* Neil Young. This band's life coincided with Molina's eventually fatal alcoholism, adding hindsight shadows to already sorrowful songs. His steady poetic eye, though, offers communion with characters, not confession. ***NICK HASTED***

Man has got a squeezebox: Chenier on stage in 1974

CLIFTON CHENIER

King Of Louisiana Blues & Zydeco

ARHOOLIE/SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS

9/10

A definitive boxset celebrating zydeco's defining auteur.
By Stephen Deusner

BORN in 1925 and raised outside of Opelousas, Louisiana, Clifton Chenier learned all about zydeco as a stowaway. His father and his cousins were musicians who played house dances across southwest Louisiana, specialising in a kind of music known then as zarico or la-la but known today primarily as zydeco. Whenever they would stop by the house, Clifton would crawl into the rumble seat of their Model A and hide out until they reached their destination. By then it was too late to take him home.

His curiosity and audacity served him well when he taught himself accordion and started playing his own shows as a teenager. What's more, he seemed to emerge as a fully formed bandleader and entertainer, shouting and pleading in French and English as he hammered the keys of his accordion.

Chenier didn't invent the music with which he is so closely associated. He was born into it, and those early shows were so imprinted on him that he displayed a fine mastery of zydeco – its peppy energy and slanted rhythms, its excitable lyrics and its bluesy plaints – on his very first recordings. He helped to export the music out of Louisiana and on to the world stage, where he was covered by Taj Mahal and John Hiatt and fêted by Rory Gallagher (who wrote "The King Of Zydeco" in his honour) and Paul Simon (who shouted him out in "That Was Your Mother"). Just last year, on what would have been his 100th birthday, he was the subject of a tribute album featuring The Rolling Stones, Lucinda Williams, Steve Earle and Charley Crockett.

While Chenier essentially created a market for this branch of American roots music, his innovations weren't merely commercial. A skilled instrumentalist whose squeezebox chords can resemble cattywampus tangos and rustic drones, he emphasised zydeco's grounding in Texas blues – an electrified strain meant for dancing and socialising. That's one of the hallmarks of Smithsonian Folkways' 4CD/6LP boxset, matter-of-factly titled *King Of Louisiana Blues & Zydeco*: its tracklist alternates between jumpy grooves and slower blues, letting each bleed into the other while sequencing strategically to create the impression of a lively late-night show somewhere near the Texas-Louisiana border. He translated his stage energy so well to the studio that you might forget you're not listening to a live album.

Chenier started recording in the 1950s, after at least a decade on the circuit (and a lifetime attending house shows), and early songs like "Boppin' The Rock" and "Rockin' Accordion" reveal an artist attuned to rock'n'roll and all its musical possibilities. This early volley of tracks – including his first hit, 1955's "Ay-Tete Fee", a reimagining of Professor Longhair's "Hey Little Girl" – settle comfortably between hard blues from Texas, R&B from New Orleans, and this new sound making stars of Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry. From his first notes, it's clear he wants to innovate rather than idle.

As the times changed, so did Chenier. While he didn't make his first long-player until the mid-1960s, he still managed to align himself first with the blues revival and later with the counterculture. Later in the decade he played a series of shows in the Bay Area, where he expanded his set to include hits by Little Richard ("Goin' Home Tomorrow") and Wilson Pickett ("634-5789"). He renders the latter almost unrecognisable: part R&B groove, part Second Line march, with his brother Cleveland Chenier's rubboard interjecting wry asides as Clifton leads the crowd in a call-and-response.

In the 1970s he absorbed heavy funk and Southern rock into his music, even recording with Elvin Bishop (of "Fooled Around And Fell In Love" fame) and keyboardist Steve Miller on 1974's *Out West*. It was a nakedly commercial endeavour meant to broaden the accordionist's popular appeal, and hopefully land a deal with a major label, but it's also an intriguing experiment that places Chenier's signature instrument deeper in the mix. The bluesy "I'm On The Wonder" and the pleading "Someone Told Me It Was All Over" put him in the context of a full rock band, where his accordion is an accent rather than a lead.

King Of Louisiana Blues & Zydeco suggests Chenier remained consistent even as he found inspiration in new trends and new collaborators. By the 1980s he was considered roots royalty, especially when 1982's jazzy *I'm Here!* won the Grammy for Best Ethnic or Traditional Folk Recording. (He was proud enough to showcase the award on the cover of his follow-up album, known as *Country Boy Grammy Winner 1984!*). In November 1987 he played his final show, headlining a small club in New York City. A month later he died of kidney disease, aged 62.

Despite his vaunted reputation, Chenier has had surprisingly few career-spanning compilations; the last truly worthwhile collection was *Zydeco Dynamite* way back in 1993. *King Of Louisiana Blues And Zydeco* is necessarily the definitive set, one that doubles as a substantial chronicle of his long career and as a history of zydeco during the rock era, when it absorbed so many new ideas without losing its distinctive edge.

SLEEVE NOTES

Disc 1
1 Louisiana Stomp
2 Clifton's Blues
3 Boppin' The Rock
4 Ay-Tete Fee
5 Rockin' Accordion
6 Baby What You Want Me To Do (Live)
7 That's Alright (Live)
8 Ay Ai Ai
9 Why Did You Go Last Night
10 Zydeco Et Pas Sale
11 Louisiana Blues
12 Lafayette Waltz
13 Hot Rod
14 Louisiana Shuffle (Live)
15 French Zydeco (Live)
16 Bon Ton Roulet
17 Jole Blonde
18 If I Ever Get Lucky
19 Black Gal
20 Keep On Scratching

Disc 2
1 Black Snake Blues
2 Let's Talk It Over
3 Walking To Louisiana
4 Johnny Can't Dance
5 Grand Mamou
6 Gone A La Maison
7 Live From PHR Studio, Clifton Chenier!
8 Mr Charlie
9 Hey Madeleine
10 634-5789 (That's My Number)
11 Drifting Blues / Breaux Bridge Waltz
12 Shake, Rattle And Roll
13 Rock House
14 Breaux Bridge Waltz
15 Ma Negresse Est Gone
16 Fannie Mae
17 Going Home Tomorrow

Disc 3
1 J'ai Conet, C'est Pas Me Femme (I Know, You're Not My Woman)
2 Since I Met You Baby
3 Cher Catin
4 You're My Mule
5 I'm On The Wonder
6 You're Fussin' Too Much
7 All Your Love
8 Zydeco Cha Cha
9 Ti Na Na (Little Na Na)
10 Someone Told Me It Was All Over
11 You Can't Sit Down
12 Oh! My Lucille
13 Take Off Your Dress
14 M'Appel Fou (They Call Me Crazy)
15 Je Suis En Racolteur (I'm A Farmer)
16 Je Marche Le Plancher (I Walk The Floor)

Disc 4
1 Tu Le Ton Son Ton (Every Now And Then)
2 Down The Road I Go
3 Calinda
4 Zydeco
5 What I'd Say
6 Dust My Broom
7 My Mama Told Me
8 Night Time Is The Right Time
9 I'm A Hog For You
10 Grand Prix
11 You Got Me Crying
12 Tit Mam's Zydeco
13 Party Down (At The Blue Angel Club)
14 I'm Coming Home (To See My Mother)

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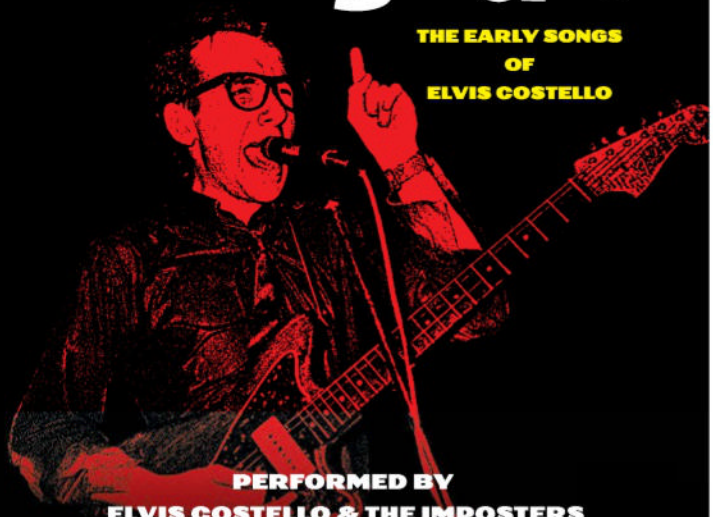

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THE SPECIALIST

KELAN PHIL COHRAN & LEGACY
African Skies
(reissue, 1993) LISTENING POSITION
9/10

Essential reissue of divine music composed to accompany a sky show at Chicago's Adler Planetarium

MANY talents orbited in and around the Sun Ra Arkestra and the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), but trumpeter, composer and educator Kelan Phil Cohran is one of the most fascinating. Born in 1927, he grew up in the American South and cut his teeth playing with pianist-bandleader Jay McShann and in a military band after being conscripted in 1950. By 1959 he had moved to Chicago, where he met John Gilmore, one of the primary saxophonists in the Arkestra, who led the band for two years after Sun Ra's death until his own in 1995.

Cohran was drawn to Ra's intense work ethic, as he told writer Peter Shapiro in *The Wire* in 2001: "You can imagine how a composer would be stimulated by Sun Ra's music. So I started rehearsing with him and the next thing I know, we were rehearsing six hours a day and playing six hours a night... That opened my world up as a composer. I had written a few songs of merit before I got with him, but he taught me the one thing that really made a difference in my life, and that is: whatever you want to do, do it all the time. Once I learned that, there was no looking back."

In addition to the trumpet, Cohran played stringed instruments, including the zither in the Arkestra. When the band left Chicago, Cohran stayed and maintained roots there until he died in 2017, aged 90. He was one of the co-founders of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, a nonprofit organisation that still functions as a supportive space for jazz musicians, composers and educators, and whose key figures include saxophonist-composers Roscoe Mitchell and Anthony Braxton. He consistently

Blowing minds: Kelan Phil Cohran

made music throughout his life, from the Artistic Heritage Ensemble with '70s Miles Davis guitarist Pete Cosey to the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, a group that includes eight of Cohran's sons.

Released in 1993 under the name Kelan Phil Cohran & Legacy, *African Skies* is one of his most intriguing albums and easily one of the most vital post-1970s spiritual jazz records. Cohran, who was a member of the planetarium and often conducted research at their library, was approached to score a programme called *African Skies*. The instrumentation is singular: two double basses, two harps, lots of percussion, cornet, voice and the Frankiphone, an electrified kalimba that Cohran built himself. The entire album swirls with transcendental depth and is a profoundly pleasurable listen from front to back, but the magical "White Nile" is a standout, the sublime glory of the harp reaching beyond the boundaries of the planet to express the astral beauty of the skies above Africa.

ANA GAVRILOVSKA

MERCURY REV
All Is Dream (reissue, 2001)
CHERRY RED
7/10

Double-disc, gatefold edition marks its 25th year

Following up 1998's benchmark *Deserter's Songs* must have posed a major challenge, but three years on, Mercury Rev delivered an extension, albeit lusher and more grandly filmic, thus cementing their status as spinners of Americana, Disney soundtracks and psychedelia into cosmic wonderment weighted with sadness. Again produced by Dave Fridmann, it sees Jonathan Donahue letting rip with his fears and vulnerabilities right from the off with the irresistibly OTT, baroque-pop sweep of "The Dark Is Rising". "Little Rhymes" (made when he's "*alone and scared*") and the deceptively swinging "Nite And Fog" ("*...are my days*") emphasise the state of his psyche.

Extras: 7/10. This reissue's punctum is inevitably the 15-track disc of B-sides, outtakes and demos, though several appeared on 2011's 4CD reissue. There's intrigue in "Where The Mountains Start To Rise", a mournful piano sketch, and the equally brief, Debussy-like "A Quick One At Artie's 44", while the woodwind-grazed cover of "Blue Skies" charms. ***SHARON O'CONNELL***

THE NECESSARIES
Completely Necessary (Anthology 1978–1982)
OMNIVORE
8/10

Hidden pop/new wave mini-gems – necessary indeed

For some time now, The Necessaries have been reduced to a footnote in the Arthur Russell story, his slow but steady ascent to genius status overshadowing the literate guitar pop made by this little group who could. Admittedly, their backstory suggests a confluence of bad luck and bloodymindedness, with their unfinished demos released, surreptitiously, by their label as 1981's *Big Sky*; withdrawn at the group's insistence, they reshaped the material into 1982's *Event Horizon*, the first disc here. Russell is present, of course, his yearning voice at the heart of songs like "More Real", but key to *Event Horizon* is the interplay of songs by Ed Tomney and Russell, with contributions by bass player Ernie Brooks (of The Modern Lovers), who made up a formidable rhythm section along with The Red Krayola's Jesse Chamberlain.

Extras: 7/10. Subsequent demo material – equally charming and whip-smart – fills out two more discs, plus liner notes. ***JON DALE***

THE ONLY ONES
Even Serpents Shine (reissue, 1979) MUSIC ON VINYL
9/10

Ragged boho heroes' excellent second album

After their outstanding 1978 self-titled debut, The Only Ones delivered more of the same on *Even Serpents Shine*, reissued here on vinyl. Although there are no three-minute power-pop classics like "Another Girl, Another Planet", Peter Perrett was still in excellent form as a songwriter and performer, casually tossing off laconic gems like "Flaming Torch", the thumping fury of "Miles From Nowhere" and the drawling "Out There In The Night", songs that showcase a unique voice, incredible gift for lyrics and Pete Shelley-like ear for a melodic line. Underneath Perrett sits John Perry's equally distinctive lead guitar sound, plus the band's creative arrangements – here featuring organ from session player John Bundrick. It's a record with few weak spots, and the romantic misery of "In Betweens", "Miles From Nowhere" and "Curtains For You" are as good as anything the band recorded during their glorious but tragically brief career. ***PETER WATTS***

PRINCE
Hit n Run Phase One & Two (reissues, 2015) SONY
7/10, 7/10

First vinyl issues for the Purple One's two-part finale

Prince's death in 2016 robbed him of the chance for a more deliberate, *Blackstar*-style swansong. Yet the final albums he released during his lifetime – which now belatedly make their vinyl debut – nevertheless served as a fair summary of the artist's efforts in the 21st century. Sporadically thrilling, though too erratic to entirely satisfy, both phases of *Hit n Run* see their creator flit with considerable finesse between many styles without landing on one for long. The ecstatic nu-disco standout "Fallinlove2nite" and the glossy glimmers of EDM throughout make Phase One feel more coherent than its counterpart, despite the nods to Warner-era triumphs in tracks like "Baltimore", a bittersweet pop number that might've had a home on *Around The World In A Day*. As always with the man's latter-day releases, there are enough high points – be it the blissed-out balladry of Phase One's "This Could B Us" or the Earth, Wind & Fire-y funk of Phase Two's "Xtraloveable" – to whet appetites for the next thing, a fact that lends poignancy to even the most carnally fixated offerings here. ***JASON ANDERSON***

SMALL FACES
Ogdens' Nut Gone Flake (reissue, 1968) NICE
9/10

"Are you all sitting comftybold...?"

The Only Ones: romantic misery

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

On a roll: the Small Faces in 1967

Nice Records continue their run of super reissues with a new version of *Ogdens'...*, cut at half-speed from the excellent 2018 mono remaster which was transferred from the last remaining analogue master tape. That half-speed cut immediately brings rewards in the form of a richer, resounding sound – particularly the phasing and orchestral sections, but extending right through each track – while there's also a reproduction of the original artwork. As well as the new vinyl edition, this edition comes in a 3CD version with mono and stereo versions of the original album and a third disc of outtakes and rarities. These include alternative mixes of songs like "Afterglow" and "Lazy Sunday", plus studio outtakes like the country groover "Kamikhazi" and a jam of Brenda Holloway's soul slow-burner "Every Little Bit Hurts". These all featured on the 2018 boxset, which was published in limited numbers and is now sold out.

Extras: 9/10. Sleevenotes by Mark Paytress and Kenney Jones, mono and stereo versions, outtakes.

PETER WATTS

TOSHI TSUCHITORI AND RYUICHI SAKAMOTO
Disappointment-Hateruma (reissue, 1976)
WEWANTSOUNDS
7/10
Bold collaboration from Tokyo

Recorded when Sakamoto was still a student at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, studying composition and involved in Tokyo's experimental music scene, this collaborative album with celebrated percussionist Toshi Tsuchitori captures Sakamoto a few years before he found wider recognition with Yellow Magic Orchestra. Originally out in 1976 and now remastered for its first wide-release on vinyl, the LP unfolds over four expansive pieces that blur the lines between free improv, ambient exploration and ritualistic sound play. The nearly 20-minute opener "綾 (Aya)" unfolds through prepared piano, bells, gongs and marimba, creating a hypnotic environment where texture outweighs traditional melody. The subsequent tracks dive deeper into cross-textured improv, with Tsuchitori's rhythmic inventiveness driving and punctuating Sakamoto's exploratory piano and electronic touches. Uncompromising and deeply adventurous, *Disappointment-Hateruma* reveals a bold early voice in Sakamoto's evolution – essential for those curious about the roots of his boundary-defying career.

MICHAEL BONNER

VARIOUS
Junglist! – Old Skool Ragga, D&B, Jungle 1993–95
SOUL JAZZ
9/10
Ruffneck ragga-rooted brutalism from jungle's ferocious first wave

We sometimes forget how heavily early jungle borrowed from Jamaica. Half the tracks on this 14-track compilation are effectively remixes of late-'80s and early-'90s singles by dancehall MCs including Cutty Ranks, Top Cat, Redrose, Poison Chang, Papa Levi, Beenie Man and Terror Fabulous, while the rest draw heavily from ragga samples. But all have been rhythmically ravaged by London junglists. These tracks predate the gentrifications of "artkore" or "intelligent drum'n'bass", but the productions by the likes of DJ Rap, Bizzy B, Justin "Just Jungle" Richardson and Whitehouse Crew are as insanely complex as anything that Photek or LTJ Bukem would later come up with. The Jamaican melodies are sprayed with the machine-gun fire of the "Amen" or "Sesame Street" breakbeats, which have been time-stretched, sliced up and mutilated to the point that almost every bar sounds different. ***JOHN LEWIS***

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Music From The Caucasus: The Archive Of Ored Recordings 2013–2023 TAL
8/10
Rich and eloquent field recordings of traditional music

The work Bulat Khalilov and Timur Kodzoko have undertaken with their Ored Recordings label, has been nothing short of revelatory. Informed by a 'punk ethnography' that's perhaps best understood through such activities as samizdat recording practices and the cantankerous spirit of labels like Sublime Frequencies, the pair have documented a rich history of music from the Caucasus on the Ored Bandcamp page. This comp, bumping a child's clutch of Ored material to vinyl, was personally selected by TAL's Stefan Schneider (Mapstation, To Rococo Rot, So Sner) – and he's captured both the homespun beauty of this music, from raw vocal ululation to sweetly melodic wind instrument outfits (the gorgeous "Arazbari"), and the political dimensions of the Ored project, through the juxtapositions – sonic, geographic, colonial – that shiver through these 15 selections.

Extras: 7/10. Lucid, elegant liner notes from Khalilov. ***JON DALE***

VARIOUS ARTISTS
This Can't Be Today – A Trip Through The US Psychedelic Underground 1977–1988 CHERRY RED
8/10
Three-disc comp roams wide

Working to a wide remit, this triple set opens with garage revivalists (The Last's "She Don't Know Why I'm Here") and closes with ur-shoegazers (Ultra Vivid Scene's "The Mercy Seat"). In between, Disc One is the most cohesive, corralling the best of the Paisley Underground movers, from the thrift store jangle of The Bangs, The Dream Syndicate, The Rain Parade and REM to the proto-Americana of The Long Ryders and Green On Red. If this feels like a satisfactory overview of a particular time and shared record collections, the second and third discs stray a little further: the links between, say, Thin White Rope and The Flaming Lips feel looser and less ideological. That's not to say the music isn't uniformly great: any compilation that roams from Chris Bell's "I Am The Cosmos" to Hüsker Dü's "Hardly Getting Over It" and The Cynics' "Take Her Hand" will surely kickstart your day. ***MICHAEL BONNER***

KLAUS WIESE
Uranus – Tibetan Singing Bowls (reissue, 1988) BLACK SWEAT
8/10
Popul Vuh dreamer's third-eye epiphany

Wiese was a member of Popul Vuh in the early 1970s before leaving to pursue more personal spiritual matters – including mastering Tibetan singing bowls – which shaped not just the direction of his music but his quest for a kind of universal purity. Between 1981– '91 he released 25 tapes of rich, new-age-aligned ambient, some made with wind, cymbals and zither, but he found the best way to express his inner self was through the unbroken harmonic chant of the singing bowls. Now on LP/CD, *Uranus* is a beautiful example of his process, two deeply sonorous 30-minute pieces that suggest, funnily enough, the sleek synthesised tone of an electric car in motion, both unsettling and calming, though Wiese viewed the ritual as a meditation on the "trans-personal sphere of the sixth chakra", one's third eye. Special thanks, he also notes, "to all those who discouraged me to do this work". ***PIERS MARTIN***

COMING NEXT MONTH...

TINARIWEN's upcoming *Hoggar* is reviewed next time, along with promising new albums from **Courtney Barnett**, **Bonnie 'Prince' Billy**, **Morrissey**, **José González**, **Alexis Taylor**, **Spencer Cullum's Coin Collection**, **Flea** (featuring Thom Yorke, Nick Cave and Jeff Parker) and much more. Archivally speaking, there'll be reissues and boxsets from Terry Hall's **The Colourfield**, the late **Mick Abrahams**, **Johnny Cash**, **Klaus Nomi** and many others.

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MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Totally wired: Kim Gordon in 2025 – musician, conceptual artist, actress and filmmaker

TWENTIETH CENTURY GIRL

Fifteen years on from the dissolution of Sonic Youth, KIM GORDON remains the high priestess of American noise. As a new album, *PLAY ME*, continues to refine her radical creative vision, she holds court on '90s reunions, tech bros, the horrors of 'confessional art' and her own prolific solo career. "In a band, everything is a negotiation," she tells Stephen Troussé. "Now, I just follow the instinct."

Photo by MONI HAWORTH

"I do feel like I'm still pretty punk": Gordon in Milan touring her second solo album, *The Collective*, October 28, 2024

ELENA DI VINCENZO/ARCHIVIO ELENA DI VINCENZO/MONDADORI PORTFOLIO VIA GETTY IMAGES

"I THINK it takes a lifetime to get to a sweet spot in your career," says Kim Gordon, her low vocal fry barely rising above the clatter and hum of the café. "That moment when things really start working for you, when the friction between what you want to do and what you are allowed to do finally disappears. I feel like that has happened for me. It's a strange feeling, to be moving this fast when the world expects you to be slowing down."

We are seated in a plush hotel deep in the corporate belly of Holborn, a grey, rain-slicked expanse of central London that has spent the last decade trying to rebrand itself as 'Midtown'. There was a time when Kim Gordon was the physical embodiment of a very different milieu: Downtown. The queen of the Lower East Side, she was the cool détachée in the centre of the Sonic Youth storm, the bassist who grounded the skronk with her defiantly stoic presence.

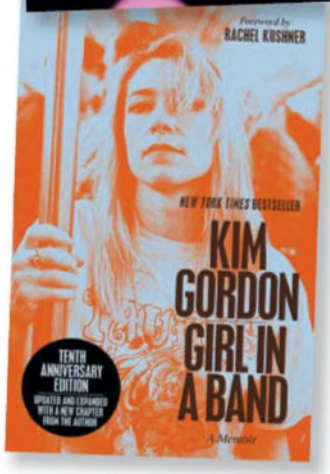
That version of New York is a museum exhibit now, while Gordon has long since ascended from the noise cellar to the hushed white cube. Today, sipping mineral water and ignoring a tiered stand of pastries, she exists in a more refined topography – a world of high-end galleries, international film festivals and cultural prestige. She is dressed with understated elegance. Her blonde bob is cut with geometric precision.

Aged 72, Gordon is currently experiencing the most prolific, high-velocity era of her life. She landed in the UK yesterday, flying in from Portugal to promote *The Chronology Of Water*, Kristen Stewart's directorial debut in which Gordon plays a pivotal role. Her memoir *Girl In A Band* was recently reissued in a 10th-anniversary edition. Originally published in 2015, it dissected the end of her marriage to Thurston Moore and the dissolution of Sonic Youth with clinical candour.

If that dissolution was the end of an era, the last decade has been a stunning rebuttal to the idea of the 'legacy act'. Julia Cafritz, Gordon's bandmate in the noise-rock supergroup Free Kitten, views this resurgence as a testament to Gordon's resilience. "She was really broken for a moment, but it never occurred to her to stop doing things," says Cafritz. "Suddenly this band that seemed like her life's work and a pretty reliable revenue stream was cut off. So, girl went to work."

Cafritz notes the irony of the memoir's title. "Kim was never 'the girl in the band'. Usually, the 'girl in the band' has a baby or stops playing. Kim didn't want to fade into the woodwork."

This work ethic has birthed a new phase of impressive activity. In the last 24 months, Gordon has held major retrospective art exhibitions from Berlin to Tokyo, and released two acclaimed solo albums that reinvented her sound and gained Grammy nominations. Now she is in London to talk about her latest album, *PLAY ME*.



"It feels like a lot of motion," she admits. "People keep asking me if I'm tired. But I think motion is better than stasis. Stasis is dangerous. When you stop moving, the concrete sets."

When the subject of this late-career explosion arises, she offers a pragmatic assessment. "It was a sink or swim kind of thing," she says. "I didn't want the band to end. Nobody wants to go through that. But once it happened... I guess it kicked me into a new gear. I feel like I'm finally doing exactly what I want to do, without having to compromise by committee. In a band, everything is a negotiation. Now, I just follow the instinct."

PLAY ME is the culmination of a decade-long collaboration with Justin Raisen, the Los Angeles producer known for his work with Charli XCX and Yves Tumor. Since her debut solo single "Murdered Out" in 2016, Raisen has piloted Gordon's "minimal, trashy" aesthetic into new 21st-century realms, but on *PLAY ME*, they have pushed that sound until it fractures completely.

If 2024's *The Collective* was a

Sink or swim: (l–r) Thora Birch, Imogen Poots, Kristen Stewart and Kim Gordon at a photocall for *The Chronology Of Water* at the Cannes Film Festival, May 16, 2025

brick-heavy confrontation with the modern world, *PLAY ME* takes the glitchy, blown-out beats of the previous record and subjects them to extreme stress testing. It's the sound of political chaos and digital decay.

Ironically, Gordon now wields digital technology with mastery. "Back in the day I never used a guitar pedal. Kim resisted tech for years," says Cafritz. "But now she has really mastered it. That is a marked difference. The way her collective works now uses a lot of backing tracks and loops."

Translating this chaos live is its own challenge. "You can't replicate these sounds with pedals," says Sarah Register, Gordon's guitarist and a mastering engineer. "It's digital distortion, clipping, all the things that engineers usually fix. We had to honour the aesthetic without relying on backing tracks. It's real-time wrestling with noise."

> **"I HAD A SENSE THAT PEOPLE ARE READY FOR DISSONANT SOUNDS"**
>
> KIM GORDON

On *PLAY ME*, the songs are noticeably concise, often clocking in at under two minutes.

"We work really quickly, we did the whole thing in a couple of weeks," says Gordon. "Justin is always saying, 'Nobody listens to something over two minutes in the rap world.'"

The album's lead single, "BYEBYE25!", exemplifies this approach. A reworking of Gordon's 2024 hit "Bye Bye", it takes the original's pile-driving beat and replaces the emergency kit packing list with a mordant litany of words reportedly banned by the Trump administration from federal documents. It ranges from the ideological ("diversity", "entitlement") to the bizarrely specific ("peanut allergy", "tile drainage"). It is a litany of erasure delivered with a deadpan sneer.

As guitarist in Gordon's current touring band, Sarah Register has witnessed the effect of the evolution of Kim's sound on audiences at first-hand.

"The early shows in 2020 skewed more toward Sonic Youth fans," she says. "You saw guys in fading *Washing Machine* T-shirts, record collectors, noise dudes. But around the release of *The Collective*, I saw a shift. There was a TikTok situation with the song 'Bye Bye' that seemed to reach the youth. Suddenly, the front rows weren't grey ponytails; they were 19-year-old girls."

Gordon, who returned to her childhood home of Los Angeles a decade ago, sees the album as a mirror held up to a society being fractured by tech bros, gangsters and conmen. She describes the changing demographics of her adopted home with bemusement. "LA is really spread out," she says. "So I don't meet that many actual tech bros. They hang out in Venice or Mar Vista. They don't hang out in the art world, because they don't really like art. They like transactions, which is why they like the stupid NFTs."

The reception to *The Collective* demonstrated that there's a growing audience for her new brand of distortion. "Yeah, pretty much," Gordon admits. "I felt really good about the record, so I was happily surprised at how well it was received. I think I had a sense that people are ready for dissonant sounds. It's been incorporated a bit into the mainstream."

TO understand where Kim Gordon is in 2026, you have to rewind the tape 45 years to LA in the late 1970s, and the conceptual scene at CalArts around Tony Oursler and Mike Kelley's trash-aesthetic performance group, The Poetics.

"The band was really the background radiance that informed the other things that Mike and I were doing: the art, the installation, video and performance," remembers Oursler. "We made performances, soundtracks, a radio show and some ugly, noisy songs. Mike played the drums and squeeze toys, I was the singer and we both played spastic organ."

A 1979 lecture at CalArts by the legendary conceptualist Dan Graham attracted a

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THE ROAD TO *PLAY ME*

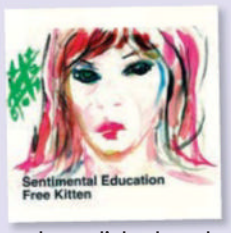
From No Wave skronk to 21st-century trap, Kim Gordon has walked on the wild side of avant-pop. Here are five essential waymarkers on her path to *PLAY ME*.

SONIC YOUTH "SHAKING HELL" (*CONFUSION IS SEX*, 1983)

Written as a commission for Dan Graham's film *Rock My Religion*, this is the Kim Gordon Rosetta Stone. Over a corroded bassline, she doesn't sing so much as invoke a possession, shifting from a breathy whisper to a feral shriek ("*I'd like to shake off this skin!*").

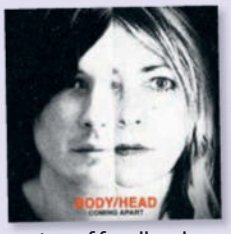
SONIC YOUTH "THE SPRAWL" (*DAYDREAM NATION*, 1988)

A masterclass in detached cool. Inspired by the fiction of Denis Johnson, Gordon delivers a spoken-word drift regarding the flatness of suburban life, bridging the gap between art-gallery intellectual and punk icon, and showing she could command a song without ever raising her voice.



FREE KITTEN "NEVER GONNA SLEEP" (*SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION*, 1997)

While Sonic Youth became festival headliners, Gordon kept it lo-fi. On this messy, bratty, and unpolished track she proved she could trade technical virtuosity for pure, unadulterated garage-punk attitude.



BODY/HEAD "ABSTRACT" (*COMING APART*, 2013)

In the wake of Sonic Youth's dissolution, Gordon returned to her first home in the avant-garde. A howling vortex of feedback and drone, this track stripped her sound down to its elemental components – electricity and voice – clearing the slate for what was to come.

KIM GORDON "MURDERED OUT" (SINGLE, 2016)

The turning point. Abandoning rock for crushing, distorted drum loops, this ode to LA's matt-black car culture signalled her current renaissance. It's industrial, trashy and undeniably groovy.

PASCAL LESEGRETAIN/GETTY IMAGES

curious Kim, already an eternal art student, shuttling from courses in Canada to LA. Oursler remembers it as a pivotal moment. "Kim seemed very shy but had a luminous smile," says Oursler. "It was like a crossroads... We all had a dogged pursuit of what art, words, sounds and images could become. Kim glimpsed that before any of us."

In 1981, freshly arrived in New York from LA, Gordon performed in Graham's installation Performer/Audience/Mirror at The Kitchen in New York. She wasn't a musician then; she was, in her own words, "a witness".

"I went to the Lab School at UCLA when I was a kid, so it was all about 'learn by doing'," she remembers. "They had separate art classes, art history and Eurhythmics where you run around imitating dinosaurs sinking into the tar pits. So I think that influenced me."

Oursler, who arrived in New York around the same time as Gordon, notes a deep connection between her upbringing and her vocal style.

"Kim had grown up right next to the guy who invented Primal Scream therapy," he says. "I always thought this made sense because, for me, there's a straight line from there to the Lennon/Ono records and the cathartic Kim Gordon."

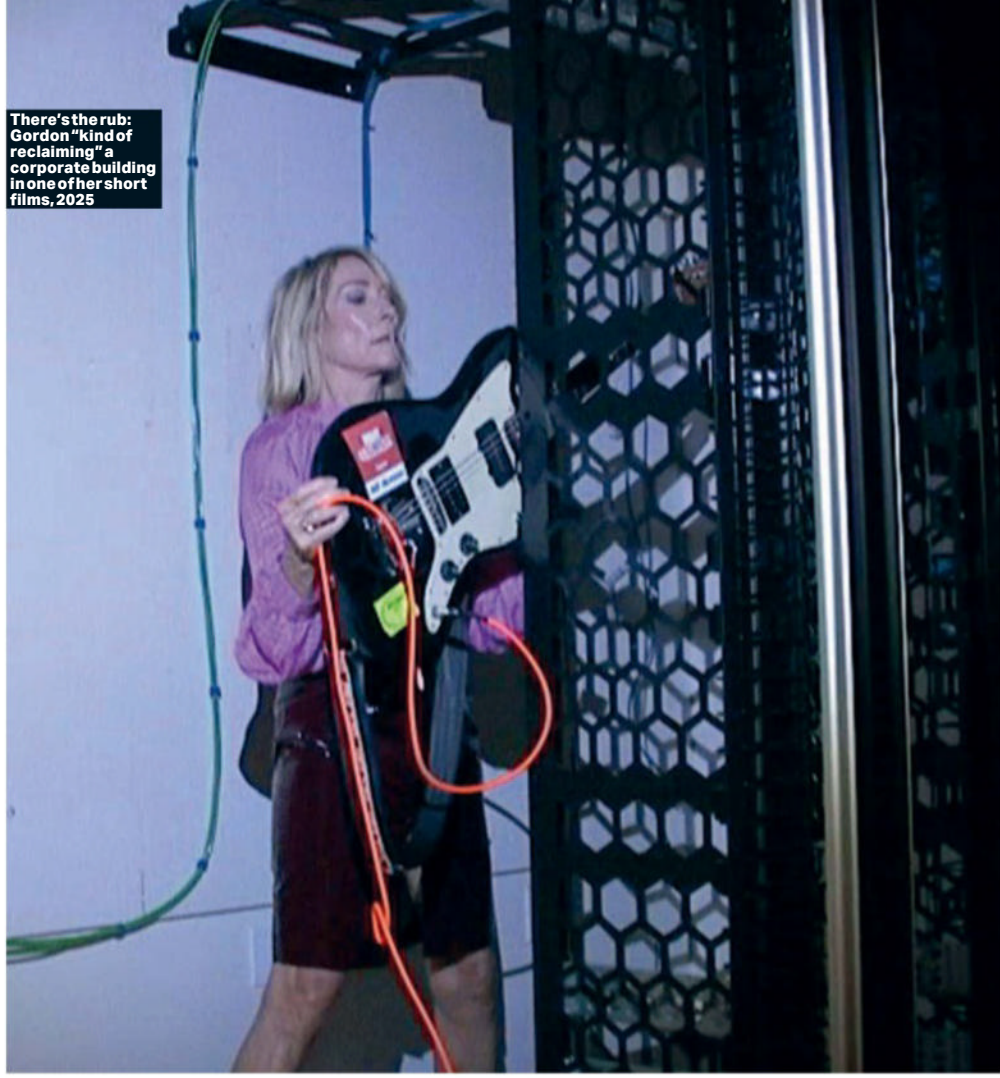
This catharsis was not immediate. Cafritz recalls that when her band Pussy Galore moved to New York, she initially viewed Sonic Youth with scepticism, thinking they weren't as radical as the noisier Swans. Yet, Gordon and Thurston Moore "rolled out the dirty, filthy Bowery carpet for us", buying their records and helping them find a drummer. When Sonic Youth eventually coalesced in the mid-'80s, Oursler says, "it was as though the cosmic lock had been picked. There was no stopping them and everybody wanted to be part of it."

Even in friendship, Gordon's artistic independence was fierce. Cafritz found Gordon's approach in Free Kitten "incredibly freeing and challenging. I used to look at her on stage and think, 'What the hell are you doing?' But then I would just roll with it... She has the confidence that she'll find you."

That tactile sense of art-making – of 'sculpting' sound rather than writing songs – remains her primary mode. It is evident in the *PLAY ME* track "Busy Bee", which warps a sample of Gordon talking with Cafritz during a '90s MTV appearance over some Dave Grohl drums. The conversation is tweaked into high-pitched squeaks.

"I remembered that interview being stupid and dumb," laughs Cafritz. "But when she sent me the record... I was like, 'Oh my god, I had forgotten quite how outrageously dumb that was...'"

Even the title of Sonic Youth's 1986 album *EVOL* was a shared discovery, originally being the title of a Tony Oursler video project. "I talked to Kim quite a bit about audio possibilities... And the next thing I knew, the album came out and they used the title," says Oursler. "Everybody understands 'Love' backwards, but I also like the evolutionary aspect of it. It's a great honour to share that with Sonic Youth.



There's the rub: Gordon "kind of reclaiming" a corporate building in one of her short films, 2025

"I really love Kim's new records," he continues. "I've always been a fan of the gallery shows and the total picture. But the real 'Kim Gordon Effect' is more than specific works – it's about a commitment to subculture and experimentation. She's opened so many pathways."

BY refusing to chase relevance, Gordon has become more relevant than ever. In 2026, her influence hums beneath the music of artists who were not yet born when *EVOL* was released. On both sides of the Atlantic, younger bands like Dry Cleaning and Horsegirl carry her DNA.

"TO SEE HOW SHE OWNS THE STAGE AS A WOMAN OVER 70 – IT MATTERS"

SARAH REGISTER

"Regarding Kim, she is an amazing influence," says Sarah Register. "To see how she carries herself, how physically able she is and how she owns the stage as a woman over 70 – it matters. I've learned so much from her. She encourages you to try it, show up and experiment. In a way, she teaches you to trust yourself."

The idea of revisiting her back catalogue or joining the long revival of '90s culture that has seen peers like Dinosaur Jr or Pavement return to lucrative acclaim has never appealed.

"I liked the first Pavement reunion better than the second," she admits when we discuss the nostalgia industrial complex. "But they were one of my favourite bands. I still love to see Dinosaur Jr because J Mascis is a very close friend. But Sonic Youth songs? I think we did them well enough back in the day."

She was, however, persuaded to dust down one particular Sonic Youth song on John Mulaney's Netflix talk show in March 2025: *Washing Machine*'s "Little Trouble Girl", which she performed alongside Kim Deal. It was a disorientating, magical moment: two '90s icons, refusing to be frozen in amber, playing a song about female transgression on a comedy show.

"That was really cute," admits Gordon. "We had never played that song live, so that was interesting and difficult. It was John's idea. I was like, 'Why don't we just improvise?' But John was like, 'No, you guys, please do the song.' I wasn't confident we'd be able to do it, but we rehearsed quite a bit. Kim had the more difficult part!"

"It was wild to see them getting in a room and re-engaging those characters," says Sarah Register. "I felt the pressure not to fuck it up. It was a challenge to play this soft, precise, tender, emotive, yet weird thing."

What most excites Gordon today are the short art films she makes. "They all involve guitars,

MONIHAWORTH

A disorientating, magical moment: performing "Little Trouble Girl" with Kim Deal in 2025

Untethered: with Julia Cafritz in Free Kitten

but not necessarily in the way you might expect. The first one, I had a guitar plugged into a small amp downtown and I'm just kind of rubbing it up against corporate buildings, kind of reclaiming them. The second one is based on the Chantal Akerman film *Jeanne Dielman*. I have a guitar, but I'm ignoring it as I'm doing domestic activities, cooking or cleaning and it's banging around. The new one is a man and a woman in a room. It features a poet who reads this text I wrote about industrialisation and the lack of desire. It has a kind of Godardian vibe. The man has one line: 'I don't have a pick.' Then they put on their guitars, move towards each other and start rubbing the guitars against each other..."

FOLLOWING Miranda July's book *All Fours*, Coralie Fargeat's film *The Substance* and even Nicole Kidman's *Babygirl*, there's been much discussion in recent years of a new fierce, messy, uncompromising voice for older women in the culture. As we talk, the BBC is showcasing a new Sunday-evening drama called *Riot Women*. Does Kim feel encouraged by this? Does she feel any affinity with this moment? "Not really," she laughs. "I didn't really think about it. *Riot Women*? That sounds horrible!

"I was never interested in confessional art, or auto-fiction as they call it now," she sighs. "Expressing your personal feelings as though it's your diary? It feels like Sunday painters, art as a therapy or a hobby, you know? I loved Joni Mitchell when I was growing up. She had a vulnerability to her music, but what I loved was the sound of her voice. I always remember this thing Neil Young said: it's kind of a vanity to worry about if you have a good voice or not. It's more about how authentic does it sound?

"But I do feel like I'm still pretty punk," she laughs. "You know, I am somewhat in the experimental music world. And punk isn't a sound. It's an attitude. It's about questioning the structures of power."

She puts her relentless drive down to her family. You might catch an echo of Joan Didion in her memoir, the sense that she was raised in a mid-century California where the Great Depression was a living memory and people took nothing for granted. "My dad was a sociologist and I guessed that rubbed off on me, that sense of wanting to question everything. But my mom told me later that he had always wanted to be a poet... And my mom, I always felt like she would rather have been doing something else. I think she didn't feel that she was beautiful or didn't get enough positive reinforcement growing up. She was a faculty member's wife. She was a seamstress and made her own clothes, but she didn't have the structure or push to take it anywhere. You grow up under the weight of all this frustrated creativity."

The one peer she acknowledges is the uncompromising French novelist/filmmaker/force of nature Catherine Breillat. "I like how radical she is. She seems so fearless in how she deals with female sexuality. But of course her work isn't just about sex: it's about transcendence."

What does she mean by transcendence?

"Getting past yourself into some sort of free situation. A moment of free feeling. Breillat uses sex for it, but you can do it through music or writing or anything."

Does Kim Gordon still find moments of grace amidst the noise, the travel, the artless transactions of the modern world? Her friend, the novelist Rachel Kushner, describes her work as "surfing the inscrutable", but it's metaphor drawn from Gordon's own lived experience as a 20th-century California girl.

"I learned to surf when I was 10 in Malibu, then we lived in Hawaii for a year and I surfed at Waikiki, which is a pretty easy place to surf," she remembers.

"Later, I had a boyfriend who was an ex-pro surfer in LA and he would take me out. Honestly, I hated the wetsuit thing," she laughs. "But when you're out on the water? It's as if you're being pushed by some other power. When you catch a wave, it's exciting. You feel this surge underneath and behind you. It's like being on stage in the heart of a band, finding grace in the midst of violence and chaos.

"I'm pretty proud to be born in the 20th century," she says, as we part and she prepares for the next stop on her relentless itinerary. "I'm from the 1900s! Before the internet. Actually, I wish I was older. I wish I was in New York in the 1950s, '60s, '70s. I hear a lot of younger people longing for that time these days and really I don't blame them. It feels like we are in a very scary time right now."

***PLAY ME* is released by Matador on March 13**

'A PURSUER OF FACTS'

Kim Gordon according to her collaborators

JULIA CAFRITZ
(PUSSY GALORE, FREE KITTEN)

"I've been thinking about the differences between how Kim and I worked in Free Kitten, and how she operates now. I feel like Kim really works like Kim, no matter who her collaborators are. She has a lot of confidence, whereas I have a lot of bravado. She has a deep willingness to just jump in and see what happens. It was both incredibly freeing and challenging to work with her in Free Kitten. She was so 'loosey-goosey'. I'd be the one saying, 'No, we're going to learn this song and practise.' But she wasn't tethered to that process."

TONY OURSLER
(MULTIMEDIA ARTIST)

"I didn't know Kim wanted to perform when I first met her. I remember we talked quite a bit about the failings of rock music and how a lot of people were trying to be radical, but were not at all. But this was the *No New York* era, and there were some very radical things happening. New York was a wonderful black hole. The cops would just watch as cars got stripped and burned. You had Mars, DNA, Teenage Jesus And The Jerks, Lydia Lunch, James White and the Contortions, and the godlike figures for me: Alan Vega and Martin Rev of Suicide. There would be a Glenn Branca show and your ears would be bleeding. I'd look over and there would be Kim and Dan Graham. And surprise: half of the future Sonic Youth was in the band. Absolute magic."

SARAH REGISTER
(LIVE GUITARIST, MASTERING ENGINEER)

"I really admire how Kim uses her voice. She is a learner, a pursuer of facts. Some people would recommend not speaking up, not calling people out, but when rights are being taken away, it feels valuable to hear someone's voice. I appreciate her engagement with the political climate. Sometimes, when I'm fried on the news, I go to her Instagram stories as my curated news feed. In a way, she teaches you to trust yourself. Seeing an artist show up in so many different formats – musician, painter, writer – and keep carving a path while just being a 'good dude' who loves her family... I have benefitted in more ways than I can say."

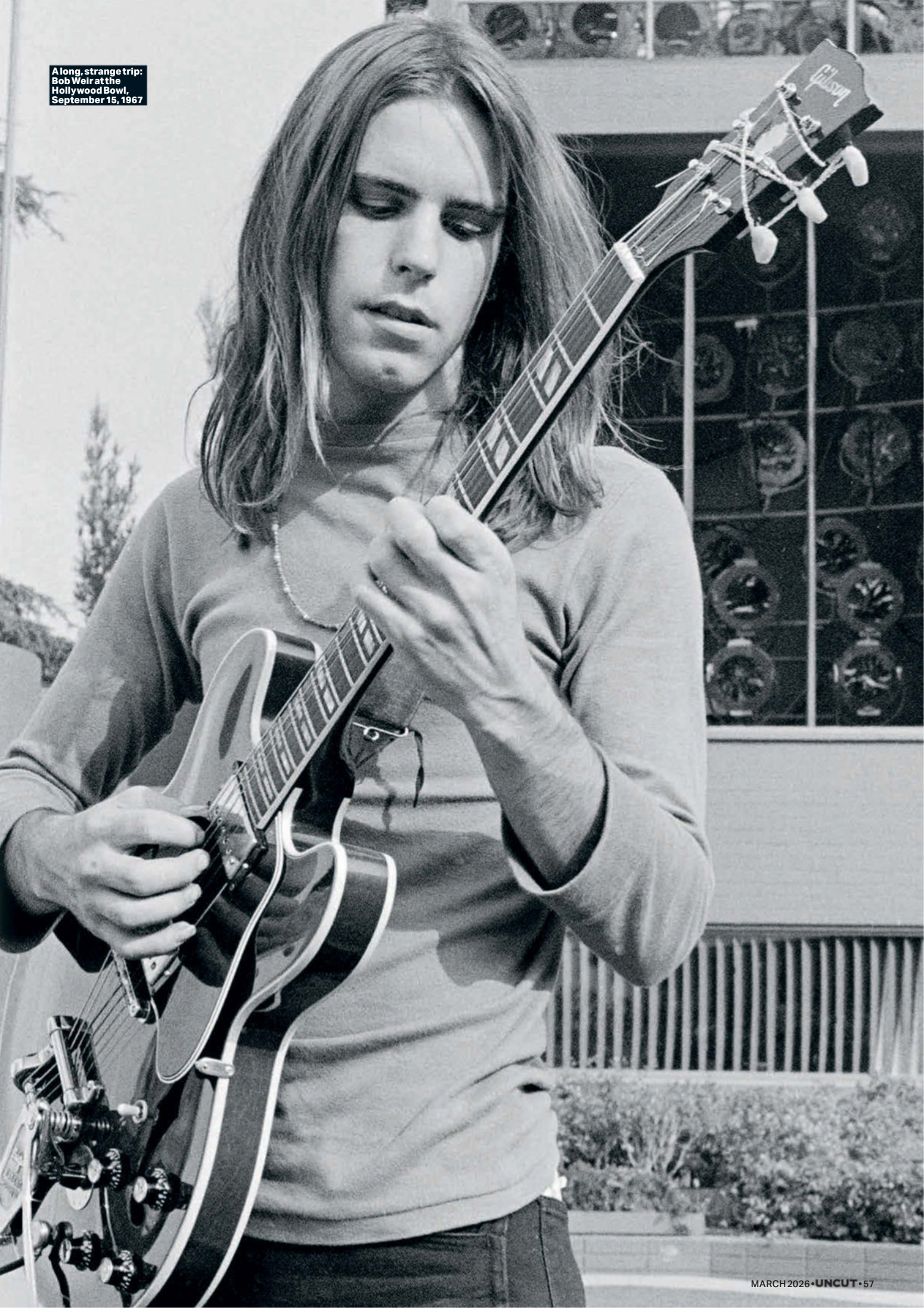
ROB KIM/GETTY IMAGES; JUSTIN SHIN/GETTY IMAGES

BOB WEIR | 1947–2026

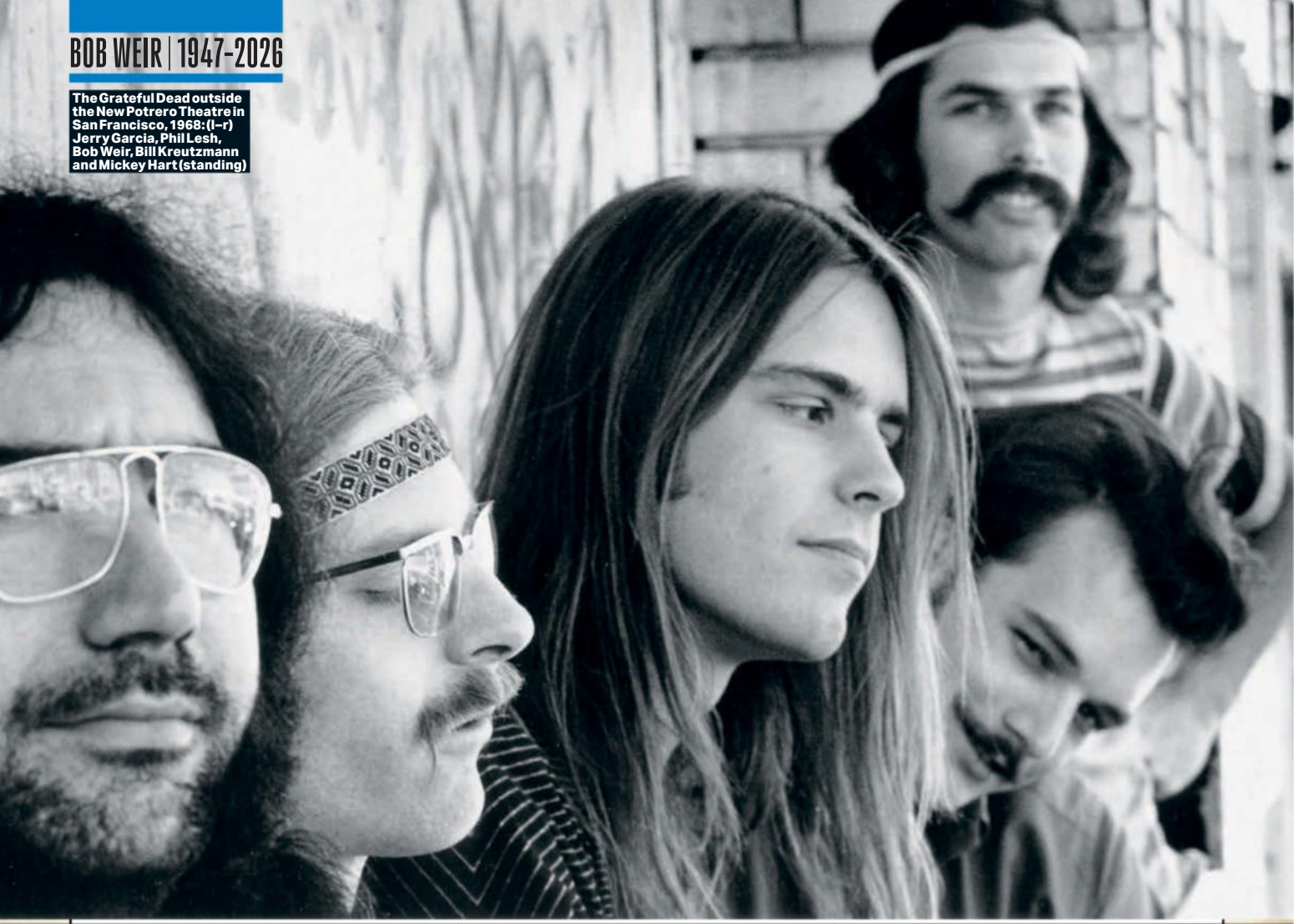
And We Bid You Goodnight

A gifted songwriter and guitar player with a dogged spirit and cosmic energy, BOB WEIR helped make the GRATEFUL DEAD one of the greatest American bands of all time. In tribute, we revisit a recent, revealing interview never before published in its entirety, and celebrate his innovative and enduring legacy. "I thought he'd go on forever," says one acolyte. "A mountain of music standing tall."

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



A long, strange trip: Bob Weir at the Hollywood Bowl, September 15, 1967



The Grateful Dead outside the New Potrero Theatre in San Francisco, 1968: (l–r) Jerry Garcia, Phil Lesh, Bob Weir, Bill Kreutzmann and Mickey Hart (standing)

MALCOLM LUBLINER/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

"THERE are ideas that Weir has had that I would never have had," Jerry Garcia said in 1981 about his Grateful Dead bandmate, the late Bob Weir. "He's an extraordinarily gifted guitar player, in a world full of people who sound like each other... With Weir, I have a real hard time recognising any influences in his playing." Garcia's observation, reflecting on a musical relationship that, at that point, spanned several decades, cuts to the core of what made Weir such an essential element in the Dead's unique chemistry.

Weir passed away on January 10 from underlying lung issues, having recently been diagnosed with, and beaten, cancer. For those of us removed from the immediate Dead orbit, it's possible to read this loss as something close to a definitive end to an era, or at least to the long-lasting Dead frontline – only drummer Bill Kreutzmann and percussionist Mickey Hart remain with us now. And while the Dead's ever-tentacling family of associated outfits will doubtless continue to mutate, with Weir gone, something about their singular spirit seems lost, too.

He was there for pretty much all the Dead's 30 years, save a few shows in 1968, as their rhythm guitarist and often lead vocalist. His presence was exuberant and playful, with an impish pranksterism in his youthful days, but also rock solid, the link that binds. As the youngest member of the original Dead lineup, he may have had the most to learn, but he learned quickly, applying his knowledge both to the group dynamic and the unique tangle of his guitar playing, which, much like his spiritual presence, had a unifying force, threading together countless musicians who often seemed to be heading in several different directions at once.

AN IMPISH PRANKSTER, HE WAS ALSO ROCK SOLID

If Garcia had wit and Phil Lesh had mystery, Weir had charm – bucketloads of it. But he also had a dogged attitude that kept things moving for the group and their extended entourage. When the Dead split after the death of Garcia – a profound loss for Weir, given their brotherly relationship – he was central to the post-Dead life of their collective music, helping shepherd Dead & Company into existence in 2015. Before then, he'd been involved with other post-Dead outfits like The Other Ones and The Dead. And somehow he also found time for his own music, with RatDog, and an excellent solo album, *Blue Mountain*, in 2016.

In some ways, though, it feels like you can best grasp the magic of Bob Weir's music, his creativity and humility, on his 1972 solo album, *Ace*. It's solo in name only, really – he's backed by his friends from the Dead and most of the songs ended up in the group's repertoire, including one of their totemic melodies, the eternal "Playing In The Band". The album's warmth reflects the depth of Weir's knowledge and spirit, and the playing on the album, as beautifully in-the-pocket as it is, proves that wherever Weir went, the cosmic vision and collective generosity of the Dead travelled with him.

It's been a hard time for Dead fans recently – we also saw the passing of Donna Jean Godchaux in November of last year. Both losses sting. With Bob Weir, it's very much about saying goodbye to the centrifugal force who kept everything loosely on the rails, whose calm, resilient nature balanced the interstellar explorations of Phil Lesh, the jester spirit of Jerry Garcia, Bill Kreutzmann's rocksteadiness, Mickey Hart's unpredictable pulse. All of this and Weir's generous, glowing grin, which Patti Smith recently called "that killer smile". It was a smile that lit up stadia, granting Dead shows the kind of intimate immensity they made their own. ***JON DALE***

"Something was calling us...": Weir in Copenhagen, April 1972

Wolf Bros: "a complete reimagining of Dead music"

THE MUSIC NEVER STOPPED

In 2020, John Robinson spoke to Bob Weir for the introduction to our *Ultimate Music Guide* to the Grateful Dead, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty*. Only part of the interview was used at the time. Now here it is in full...

WHEN did you start to feel as if the Grateful Dead was a significant band? It was step by step and it was all real natural, so it didn't seem all that big of a deal to us at the time – I think we might need a couple of hundred years to properly assess the impact! It is what it is; it kept us off the streets and provided us with endless opportunity for exploration, and we were more than happy to oblige the situation. We were kindred spirits – and just like our fans we were the kinds of people who require a little adventure in our lives. I don't think everyone is like that, but we certainly were and we developed the ability to find adventure in music. That was all we needed. The rest of it came pretty naturally.

How do you think that came about? Our whole approach dawned on us relatively slowly. At first we were just being a band and working together and coming together because it was enjoyable work. But as time went on and we developed more facility with what we were doing – both with our facility and our interactions, and maybe a third, more intangible element – it became apparent that we were up to something a little different than most musical ensembles were trying to achieve. We took a lot of direction early on from the John Coltrane Quartet and Miles Davis and those kinds of outfits which relied heavily on improvisation, but also on listening closely to each other and working off what the other band members were saying.

More and more, as time went on, that was working for us, and that led us to the notion that there was something calling us... and I'm going to leave it at that because I don't know where to take it.

Your experience with recording wasn't quite as easy, was it? The studio was a clinical environment and we didn't have the ready response that we got from our live audiences. I kind of liked it but making a record was like making a painting: you layer things on, step back and get perspective, and then go this way or that way with it. A lot of the other guys were so used to the energy that the crowd response would give them, the studio tried their patience.

In the studio we tried to approximate that, but there's a tendency to go for something which amounts to what we'll call perfection, for lack of a better description – mostly because there's no immediate gratification from seeing the crowd light up with what you're doing. And so you're looking for some sort of way of gauging what you're up to, and all you have really is your own subjective considerations, and that will sort of point you towards perfecting what you're trying to state.

How did your guitar partnership with Jerry Garcia work? It was a combination of a number of things. We were listening to each other intently, but in most cases, until we broke loose – and that did happen – we were playing what you might call head arrangements. We were playing the songs: everyone had more or less a defined part; we kind of knew what to expect of each other. The idea was to subtly – usually – embellish the part. I would try to embellish so it wasn't a complete departure, because what everyone else was going to play was contingent on me being there with my part, which they were expecting. I would try and nudge the part I was playing this way or that, and everyone else was pretty much practising that same approach.

"BOBBY WAS A DREAMER"

Grateful Dead confidant DENNIS McNALLY on Weir's joyful legacy

EVEN amid the Grateful Dead, who were all anarchists doing their own thing, Bob was idiosyncratic. As a young folk guitarist about to join The Warlocks in 1965, he decided to study [pianist] McCoy Tyner's left hand as preparation. That's Bobby. In his own way, he was quite brilliant.

I went to my first Grateful Dead show in October of 1972. I remember Bobby being a little more physically emotive than Phil and Garcia, who pretty much stood still and played. There was this youthful quality to him that lasted well into his years. Garcia was cynical, Phil was intellectual and Bobby expressed things that seemed more benign, yet were very thoughtful. He was a dreamer, and he dreamt his way through a whole lot of music.

When Garcia invited me to be the band's biographer, I started hanging around the office. Bobby was always kind and open. Like all of them, he was never eager to do press. He just wanted to play music and football. He was quarterback in his pick-up team, the Tamalpais Chiefs, in Mill Valley. It was understood in that league that anyone who damaged Bob Weir's hands or arm would be under sentence of death, but otherwise he was fair game. And he somehow emerged unscathed.

Later, with RatDog, I spent four years on the bus with Bobby. After Jerry died, he went a number of years refusing to play Grateful Dead material. It's not something he'd ever talk about. Frankly, talking about emotions was not his strong point. I thought it was a form of grieving for Jerry. But his band finally convinced him to do it.

What impressed me the most was when he started the Wolf Bros [2018] with Don Was and Jay [Lane]. I saw their first show and it was extraordinary. They were playing Grateful Dead material, but not like the Dead at all. That developed until he had the Wolfpack, which included a horn section and strings. I nicknamed it the Bob Weir Big Band. It was a complete reimagining of Grateful Dead music.

Bob's legacy is inevitably part of the Grateful Dead's – that's all about free thinking, community and joy. He loved playing, as they all did. Bob held the centre of that stage with chaos breaking out all around him. He brought some of his own, too, but he also added a lot of structure to the madness. He was all about serving the music. ***ROB HUGHES***

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS; TODD MICHALEK

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"My spine became electric": Weir and the Dead live at the Family Dog at the Great Highway, San Francisco, February 4, 1970

So there was a lot of variation possible... It was way different from night to night. But we learned to take our time wading into that cloud of chaos so that we could find direction through it, individually and collectively – if we were listening to each other and were doing our job. We did what we could on a given night, depending on what kind of shape we were in – there were so many contributing factors. There were innumerable factors. We had a general formula for our approach. When it was going well I would feel it somewhere between my heart and my throat – I would breathe more freely. When we really hit that timeless place, which we did often enough, I could feel a physical feeling in my back: my spine became electric. It was no longer matter; it was more... energy. The rest of my body as well. I think the rest of the guys felt that in their own way.

Thanks to your taping policy, we can hear what that might have sounded like. When high-quality portable recording devices hit the market and people started showing up at our shows with them, our record company told us: "You've got to stop this, this is going to kill your record sales. You've got to shut these guys down." That was something we couldn't do – it would put us in the position of being police at our own shows, and that wasn't something we could wear very well. We backed up and said, "We can't do that." Jerry's quote regarding that was that once we've played the notes, they belong to the people who came to listen. And at that point the record company threw up their hands because they weren't about to hire a bunch of enforcers to wander around the crowd and travel with us. So it became basically a moot point. In retrospect, I'm told it was the start of viral marketing. It worked out well for us but we backed into it. It was the easiest and most natural thing to do.

In 1970 you made two classic records. What was the background to *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty*? We were hanging with Crosby, Stills and Nash a little bit. They moved up to Marin County right when they were hitting the airwaves and right before we did those records. And just hanging with them, the notion of songwriting and a more prosaic approach to the creation of our songs started to bud in us. And that's what grew out of it – we started songwriting, Jerry first and then I was pretty quick on his heels.

In the background? The Haight-Ashbury was starting to get pretty seedy. The media focus on the "hippie explosion" in San Francisco brought every loose nut and bolt rattling out to the coast and with them came drugs and hard drugs and all that kind of stuff. And it quickly became something quite different to what the media had been romanticising.

The title, *Workingman's Dead*... We were listening to the radio at the time and there was a tune Merle Haggard did called "Workin' Man Blues". Jerry and I in particular and most of the guys were real fond of that tune. It incorporated an aesthetic that we appreciated and so I guess I picked up a little of that. There was a lot more cross-pollinating in that period of music, different schools of music were listening to each other and were pollinating more freely.

We were dedicatedly non-topical. It seemed to us in our songwriting that the muse would tell us what we were writing about, and if we tried to tell it what we were writing about then it would necessarily come out stilted.

How were you living back then? My girlfriend was fond of horses and I'd grown up around them. Then someone gave me a couple of horses. We rented a little 80-acre spread and we started raising them. It had me stretched pretty thin. It only lasted a couple of years but I found I really wasn't up to the task of being a working musician *and* a gentleman rancher.

Were you just a naturally tight band? Did you practise? We did woodshed a lot, particularly in that era. We would practise every day for long hours. That's what it ➤

10 GREAT BOB WEIR SONGS

From road anthems to murder ballads and beyond

BORN CROSS-EYED
ANTHEM OF THE SUN, 1968
Weir's first solo song to be recorded by the Dead. A typically cryptic reflection on feelin' groovy and lookin' fine. The non-sequitur title and elliptical melody are echoed in the line, "*Fuzzy then and still so obscure...*"

SUGAR MAGNOLIA AMERICAN BEAUTY, 1970
Possibly the most winsome item in the Dead's entire catalogue. Written about Weir's then girlfriend Frankie, who "*waits backstage while I sing to you*".The "*Sunshine, daydream*" coda, often extended in live performances, was not played for an entire week when promoter Bill Graham died.

TRUCKIN' AMERICAN BEAUTY, 1970
One of the most emblematic of Dead songs, a road anthem befitting this most travelled of touring bands. Contains the legendary line, "*Lately it occurs to me/What a long, strange trip it's been*".

PLAYING IN THE BAND
GRATEFUL DEAD (AKA SKULL & ROSES), 1971
An anthemic tribute to the musical life, couched in lines that raise the escapist activity of playing rock'n'roll music to a higher level, by applying a no-big-deal attitude to various other aspects of life.

ONE MORE SATURDAY NIGHT
EUROPE '72, 1972
Another paean to rock'n'roll, with a dance party in an armoury basement "*full of dynamite and live artillery*", while the president and even God himself gets on the good foot.

JACK STRAW EUROPE '72, 1972
Brilliant murder ballad with echoes of "Me And My Uncle", as two drifters' friendship is broken by a murder committed by the eponymous Jack Straw. A co-write with Robert Hunter.

MEXICALI BLUES ACE, 1972
The first songwriting collaboration between Weir and John Perry Barlow. Another cowboy murder ballad, whose narrator killed a man because a woman asked him to, and then fled south.

THE MUSIC NEVER STOPPED
BLUES FOR ALLAH, 1975
Yet another celebration of music, with people driven to dancing like dervishes as they hear "*a band beyond description, like Jehovah's favourite choir*".

ESTIMATED PROPHET
TERRAPIN STATION, 1977
One of the few Dead songs to mention California, celebrated as the site of religious epiphany, as the titular preacher anticipates the rapture on "*a burning shore*".

KI-YI BOSSIE BLUE MOUNTAIN, 2016
A song as mysterious and stained with foreboding as any in his catalogue, this song of a reluctant alcoholic penitent was written for Weir's ailing friend, Barlow. Contains the cautionary observation of alcohol's dangerous lure: "*You best have quick reactions – it'll rattle, coil and strike*".

ROBERT ALTMAN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

takes to come together as a band and to be able to play to the other guys in the band and to have them be able to play you. There's a learning curve there, especially for young musicians. Jazz musicians do that, but that wasn't the MO of popular music. But we listened to a lot of jazz musicians and their approach seemed like a lot of fun to us – we were going to find more adventure in that approach.

These are pretty harmony-driven records. Did that come easily? Singing was just happening. We were young and it takes a while to learn to sing, but we were starting to get the drift – where you connect somewhere in your soul to your vocal apparatus and how you make that work for you in terms of storytelling and making music. It's infinitely complicated but also infinitely simple. A lot of people come straight out of the box with something you develop.

It's a great pair of albums... We knew we had some good songs going into the studio. We were only in there for two weeks, maybe three. They translated to tape pretty well. We knew we had something saleable, that people were actually going to buy. And this was new for us, because up until that point the stuff we had done was more experimental and avant-garde. Commercial viability wasn't among our considerations. It wasn't for *Workingman's Dead* or *American Beauty*, for that matter – it was just that things were arranging themselves in such a manner that this time it was going to be commercially viable. It was part of our evolution.

So it came naturally? I just wanted to write songs. It was an itch I had to scratch. You have to have a song to sing, and it occurred to me that I'm probably going to be able to write the songs that fit me best if I do it myself. I had a realisation that songs are an actual lifeform, and we host them – they come to visit our dimension. A good songwriter is someone who is adept at opening the doors and windows and letting them in. Back then it was a more simple matter. I needed to have songs to sing, so I had to get to work.

What do you count as a high point? "Truckin'" was a milestone, I'll say that. It taught us how to make meaningful art out of some pretty banal and mundane experience. We were busted in New Orleans, and that was that. So how are we going to turn that into something which is worthy of telling our grandkids, rather than the experience on its own? We could somehow transform that into art which had meaning and purpose.

In what sort of terms do you think about your legacy? I gauge our legacy by how fulfilling it was at the time we were doing it. If I listen back to recordings of those old shows I can tell pretty readily what I was feeling and if it was a good night, and I can piece together the factors to it being a good night. When I think about our music I think about what has yet to be done with it – and where it wants to go.

The Ultimate Music Guide: The Grateful Dead is available from *shop.kelsey.co.uk/uncut*

Bob Weir (centre) and Josh Kaufman (right) at the HeadCount benefit gig at Bob's TRI studio in San Rafael, California, March 24, 2012

C FLANIGAN/GETTY IMAGES

"THE DEEPEST OF HOOTS"

Bonny Light Horseman, Weir collaborator and Dead devotee JOSH KAUFMAN on Bob's groovy "cowboy swagger"

MAN, I love the Grateful Dead. I loved Bob Weir and the way he glued that band together. He played rhythm guitar – capital R rhythm guitar. He wasn't afraid of time, in music or in life. He found the cut and played it down, up, around, side to side – anywhere but where you expected it. A wild dancer of a musician. Free and imaginative and pure rock'n'roll. I still find it a crazy miracle that I got to call him a friend and collaborator.

Through my pals in The National I had the chance to meet and perform with him at a benefit concert for HeadCount in 2012, held at Bob's studio, TRI, in San Rafael. I was musical director, which meant calling him to discuss a setlist. I still hear that No Caller ID ring and my "Hello?", followed by, "Weir here..." – that unmistakable voice I'd been listening to my whole life. I asked if he'd be into covering Dylan's "Most Of The Time". I heard him pick some chords through the phone and hum a couple of bars. "Oh yeah," he said. "I could play some slide on that one too." It was immediately easy and cool.

A few weeks later we flew out from Brooklyn to rehearse and play together. The show was amazing; Bobby was vital and swinging and present. During rehearsal he kept referring to a feel he wanted us to find: "cowboy swagger". A groovy little bend in the pocket for tunes like "Me And My Uncle", "Cassidy" and "El Paso".

After that, I wanted to dig deeper. I called his manager about collaborating on new songs – modern cowboy, cosmic country folk. Instead of a brush-off I got a call. Bobby sang down the phone: "*Blue mountain you're azure deep/Blue mountain your sides are steep...*" A month later I was back at TRI, to – in his words – "see what kinda trouble we can get into". Over the next two years we built the songs that became his third and final solo album, *Blue Mountain*.

That time in my memory is absolutely brimming with deep musical and personal moments. After a late session at Dreamland in 2015, it was after midnight by the time we checked into the rental house and we were both pretty exhausted from the long day of tracking. Bob yelled, "Oh shit, look at this!" He'd found a copy of *Art Blakey And The Jazz Messengers*. "Hell yeah, it's the shit. Let's listen to it!" It was after 1am, but fuck it. We found the turntable and amp and put the record on. Right away, Bob said, "Nah, the speakers are set up all wrong." He was totally right: they were reversed, and parked in a lame spot for listening. So we spent the next half-hour rewiring them and getting it just right, just so we could sit on the couch with the lights off and hear it properly together. So Weir it hurts.

He never pulled rank. He treated me as a comrade. After the album, we toured as the Campfire Band, and it was the deepest of hoots. I thought he'd go on forever – a mountain of music standing tall.

Thanks, Bob. I'm looking back through our last few texts. You were funny and wise and curious and singular and true to the muse. Always ready to plan the next chance to play. We're gonna miss you, Ace, and we "*bid you goodnight, goodnight, goodnight*". **ROB HUGHES**

belle and sebastian

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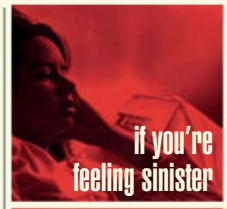

low tickets	london / royal albert hall	8th apr	london / royal albert hall	9th apr	low tickets
sold out	manchester / albert hall	11th apr	manchester / albert hall	12th apr	sold out
sold out	glasgow / kelvingrove bandstand	26th jun	glasgow / kelvingrove bandstand	27th jun	sold out

uk 2026

a crosstown concerts, dip lonely & dl concerts presentation by arrangement with wme

MAY 2026

	TUE 12	PONTARDAWE ARTS CENTRE
	WED 13	HEREFORD CATHEDRAL
	THU 14	BIRMINGHAM TOWN HALL
	FRI 15	LONDON UNION CHAPEL
	SAT 16	BEXHILL DE LA WARR PAVILION
LOW TICKETS	SUN 17	STAMFORD CORN EXCHANGE
	MON 18	LEEDS CITY VARIETIES
	TUE 19	MILTON KEYNES THE STABLES
	WED 20	SWINDON WYVERN THEATRE
	THU 21	CHRISTCHURCH REGENT THEATRE
	FRI 22	EXMOUTH PAVILION

OCTOBER 2026

	THU 08	SALISBURY CITY HALL
LOW TICKETS	FRI 09	WORCESTER HUNTINGDON HALL
	SAT 10	CHESTER STORYHOUSE
	SUN 11	LLANDRINDOD WELLS ALBERT HALL
	MON 12	EXETER CORN EXCHANGE
	TUE 13	BRISTOL ST GEORGE'S
	WED 14	BUXTON OPERA HOUSE
	THU 15	NEWBURY CORN EXCHANGE
	FRI 16	IPSWICH CORN EXCHANGE
	SAT 17	FARNHAM MALTINGS

A CROSSTOWN CONCERTS PRESENTATION BY ARRANGEMENT WITH DMF MUSIC

A CROSSTOWN CONCERTS PRESENTATION

BRISTOL SOUNDS

6 NIGHTS OF LIVE MUSIC

TUESDAY 23RD JUNE 2026
THE KOOKS
CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF INSIDE IN/INSIDE OUT
plus special guests
LOW TICKETS

WEDNESDAY 24TH JUNE 2026
SUPER FURRY ANIMALS
plus special guests
GETDOWN SERVICES & GWENNO

THURSDAY 25TH JUNE 2026
THE STREETS
FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER PERFORMING IN FULL A GRAND DON'T COME FOR FREE
plus special guests
SOLD OUT

FRIDAY 26TH JUNE 2026
ORCHESTRAL MANOEUVRES IN THE DARK
plus special guests
LOW TICKETS

SATURDAY 27TH JUNE 2026
THE STREETS
FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER PERFORMING IN FULL A GRAND DON'T COME FOR FREE
plus special guests
SOLD OUT

SUNDAY 28TH JUNE 2026
ROYEL OTIS
plus special guests

JUNE 2026
CANONS MARSH AMPHITHEATRE, BRISTOL, BS1 5LL

A Crosstown Concerts presentation by arrangement with DMF Music

KATHERINE PRIDDY
THESE FRIGHTENING MACHINES
ALBUM TOUR 2026

	APR 16	STROUD - THE SUB ROOMS
LOW TICKETS	APR 18	SOUTHAMPTON - PAPILLON
LOW TICKETS	APR 19	CAMBRIDGE - JUNCTION 2
	APR 22	BRISTOL - ST GEORGE'S
	APR 23	LONDON - UNION CHAPEL
LOW TICKETS	APR 24	NOTTINGHAM - METRONOME
SOLD OUT	APR 28	OXFORD - HOLYWELL MUSIC ROOM
	APR 29	MANCHESTER - STOLLER HALL
	MAY 01	GATESHEAD - GLASSHOUSE SAGE TWO
	MAY 05	BUXTON - PAVILION ARTS CENTRE
	MAY 07	EXETER - PHOENIX
	MAY 08	CARDIFF - THE GATE

THE LEMONHEADS

UK TOUR 2026

30.09 SHEFFIELD ELECTRIC	06.10 SWG3 GLASGOW
01.10 BEXHILL DE LA WARR PAVILION	07.10 ALBERT HALL MANCHESTER
02.10 LONDON TROXY	09.10 ELECTRIC BRISTOL
03.10 NORWICH UEA	10.10 O2 INSTITUTE BIRMINGHAM
05.10 NEWCASTLE BOILER SHOP	11.10 ROCK CITY NOTTINGHAM

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goldie lookin chain

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2026

sept–nov 2026

03/09	SOUTHEND	*CHINNERY'S*
04/09	NORWICH	*THE ADRIAN FLUX WATERFRONT*
05/09	CAMBRIDGE	*JUNCTION*
17/09	EDINBURGH	*LA BELLE ANGELE*
18/09	GLASGOW	*GARAGE*
19/09	MIDDLESBROUGH	*EMPIRE*
24/09	PLYMOUTH	*DEPO*
25/09	EXETER	*LEMON GROVE*
26/09	BRISTOL	*ELECTRIC*
08/10	NOTTINGHAM	*THE NEST*
09/10	LINCOLN	*ENGINE SHED*
10/10	SHEFFIELD	*ELECTRIC*
22/10	MANCHESTER	*NEW CENTURY*
23/10	BIRMINGHAM	*XOYO*
24/10	STOKE	*THE SUGARMILL*
29/10	GLOUCESTER	*GUILDHALL*
30/10	NARBERTH	*QUEENS HALL*
31/10	SWANSEA	*THE PATTI*
12/11	LIVERPOOL	*CAMP & FURNACE*
13/11	BETHESDA	*NEUADD OGWENR*

crosstown concerts presents

John Bramwell
of I Am Kloot

MARCH — UK 2026

THU 05	OXFORD, JERICHO TAVERN	*LOW TICKETS*
FRI 06	BRISTOL BEACON, LANTERN HALL	
SUN 08	LONDON, BUSH HALL	
WED 11	NOTTINGHAM, THE CHAPEL	
THU 12	NOTTINGHAM, THE CHAPEL	
SAT 14	SHEFFIELD, SIDNEY & MATILDA	
THU 19	YORK, THE CRESCENT	*LOW TICKETS*
SAT 21	MANCHESTER, FOLK FESTIVAL	
THU 26	LANCASTER, THE GREGSON CENTRE	
FRI 27	LYTHAM ST ANNES, LOWTHER PAVILION THEATRE	
SAT 28	DARWEN, SUNBIRD RECORDS	

A CROSSTOWN CONCERTS & FRIENDS PRESENTATION BY ARRANGEMENT WITH OUTSIDER ARTISTS

JESCA HOOP

FRIDAY 22ND MAY 2026
UNION CHAPEL, LONDON

A CROSSTOWN CONCERTS PRESENTATION BY ARRANGEMENT WITH PITCH & SMITH

"Wrote For Luck" *by* Happy Mondays

How a single from "the E album" *Bummed* – and its acid house remixes – became Madchester's defining moment

ALTHOUGH "Wrote For Luck" put Happy Mondays on the map, it still gives drummer Gaz Whelan a headache. Whenever he hears it, Whelan gets a flashback to when the song was written, during a hungover post-Haçienda jam at The Boardwalk, the band's rehearsal space in Manchester. "It's probably the most vivid memory of any song we wrote," he says. "It makes me feel nauseous even to this day."

Released at the end of 1988, the original "Wrote For Luck" is emblematic of the Mondays' baggy groove, with keyboard and guitar firing out short, catchy riffs that sit on top of a shuffling rhythm – all leaving ample space for Shaun Ryder's drawled vocal and surreal lyrics. Its impact was enhanced by a video, shot at Legends nightclub in Manchester, that brilliantly captured the emerging acid culture: the band and their friends packing out a strobe-filled dancefloor, high on ecstasy, locked to the beat and seemingly oblivious to the camera. "It's a bit like [Flowered Up's] 'Weekender'," says Bez. "We wanted to go along with the theme of the moment and had a go with the 'Wrote For Luck' video – but the Cockneys took it one step further."

The video was directed by the Bailey Brothers, aka Philip Shotton and Keith Jobling, who coined the term "Madchester" during a script meeting with Factory's Tony Wilson.

"Wrote For Luck" was originally recorded with Martin Hannett for the *Bummed* album. But Factory recognised that acid house offered a secondary market for the band if their songs were remixed for the clubs.

"That got to people who had never heard the Happy Mondays before," says Shaun Ryder. "These were commercial songs that could be played on the radio and in the clubs."

A pair of dancey remixes were released in 1989. Erasure's Vince Clarke produced the pounding six-minute A-side, while DJ Paul Oakenfold's "W.F.L. (Think About The Future)" played up the shimmering psychedelia: a euphoric vision that proved to be the beginning of a vibrant relationship. Thanks to the success of "W.F.L.", Oakenfold produced the band's third album, *Pills 'N' Thrills And Bellyaches*, Happy Mondays' definitive contribution to the Second Summer Of Love. ***PETER WATTS***

TOM SHEEHAN; EUGENE RICHARDS

"Everybody was off their tits": Paul Ryder, Bez, Shaun Ryder, Gaz Whelan, Mark Day and Paul Davis in 1989

SHAUN RYDER: *Bummed* was really the E album. We were taking E every day when we wrote "Wrote For Luck" at The Boardwalk, our rehearsal space. We'd started out in a rehearsal room in Salford, then moved to a mill in Salford, which used to have bareknuckle boxing fights going on. Then we moved to The Boardwalk in the centre of town. It opened at 10am and we were in there until 10pm at night.

BEZ: Back in the old days, all the songs were written in the practice room. Everybody would get in a room and we'd get off our nuts, smoking and all that, drinking and the usual. It was quite a social occasion. The band used to jam and the lyrics would follow.

GAZ WHELAN: The Boardwalk was 800 metres from the Haçienda, so sometimes we'd crash there. Me and Paul Ryder

KEY PLAYERS

Shaun Ryder
Vocals

Bez
Vibes

Gaz Whelan
Drums

Vince Clarke
Remix producer

John Spence
Engineer

went there after a night out and our keyboard player [Paul Davis] was already there, learning to play "Two Tribes". Paul and I joined in and then mixed in "Running Up That Hill" as we all loved Kate Bush. That became "Wrote For Luck". On the Monday, we took it to rehearsal. [Guitarist] Mark Day straight away played that riff and that's the song.

RYDER: The hook would have come up through Mark's guitar and our kid's bass. In those days, we'd start with a bassline and then add a guitar lick. Gaz would add his drums. I'd be sitting there while they were jamming and write the lyrics there and then. Its aways hard to say what it's about. At the end of the day, I write cartoons. Those early songs were in-jokes and songs about our mates. "Wrote For Luck" was probably about a couple of different things that I put together.

WHELAN: Shaun would sit on the floor with a pen and a microphone, listen to the music and scribble stuff down while we played for hours. We all thought because of the vitamins we were consuming that he was singing "Wrote For Love". It was only when me and Paul got the album that we realised it was "Wrote For Luck".

"We wanted to be a disco Velvet Underground"

GAZ WHELAN

RYDER: What's it about? Let me think. "*I hold the line/You form the queue*" was definitely about knocking out drugs. "*You used to speak the truth/But now you're clever*" was one of my own. The line "*And you were wet/But you're getting drier*", I got that from the film *Stardust*, starring David Essex – the character he played in the film, Jim MacLaine, said it. I was always listening for good lines and put them into songs like samples.

BEZ: I don't really know if Shaun surprised me as I was amazed that anybody could make music. It's not an easy thing to do, over and over. But I know a few of his secrets now. It doesn't take much to set him off, he just needs a good one-liner and the whole song develops from that.

WHELAN: Bez would come up with 10 ideas and nine were ludicrous and one was great. He was a great person to have in the room when we were writing music, because he had a good knowledge of music and made a lot of good suggestions.

BEZ: I went on stage the first time because Shaun needed some moral support as he had done a slight overdose of acid. I've played a supporting role ever since. Shaun was painfully shy about his talent and would hide behind the mic, and I was like a distraction for him – shaking me maracas and dancing me bollocks off.

WHELAN: Mark used a weird tuning that Martin Hannett had given him. He played it on this Schecter guitar, like a block of wood. He still plays that guitar when we do it live.

RYDER: The album was done with Martin Hannett in a studio in Driffield [The Slaughterhouse]. Working with Martin was great. He was one of us, basically: a naughty fucking kid who liked to get off his tits as well. It was like having one of us as a producer.

BEZ: We did the first record with John Cale and were very excited to be doing the second album with Martin Hannett, another legendary producer. He could sense it was an acid-orientated tune, or at least our version of it.

WHELAN: We loved Martin and really hit it off. The studio was next to a pub and he hadn't drunk for four years. He ordered a Coke, then changed his mind and had a Stella. We were still there 12 hours later, listening to his stories.

JOHN SPENCE: Colin Richardson was the house engineer at The Slaughterhouse and a very good friend. He called and said he was not enjoying the session. He was sitting for hours doing nothing, so could I take it over. I began on a Monday morning and didn't see anybody in the studio until Tony Wilson walked in on the Thursday looking for Shaun. Apparently, Martin would regularly disappear, so the band didn't come in.

BEZ: You hear all the mad stories about Martin, but we must have got him when he was doing

➤➤

"It was a good place to be": Shaun and Bez in '89

all right. We might have plied him with a lot of ecstasy because he was really sociable with us. Everybody that took the drug was affected by the experience.

SPENCE: It was obvious they were on something. Driffield is an East Yorkshire market town surrounded by farms and army bases, so the tradition is that every Friday and Saturday the squaddies come into town and fight the local farmhands. There was a window in the control room where you could watch them fighting outside the nightclub, Odins. All the time the Happy Mondays were there, there was no violence because of what the band and their friends were distributing among the local population. There was a very different vibe.

WHELAN: Martin was like an English version of Spector. He had great ideas and was very patient. He played bass, so spent a lot of time on bass and drums. He would measure out the space between two mics with a cigarette butt. One time, the engineer set it up and Martin said it didn't sound right. He went into the room, then came back to the booth and said, "I thought so, here's the culprit: they used a Marlboro Light – it should be a Marlboro Red."

SPENCE: Ha! That's a great story. The big room at The Slaughterhouse was good for drums. They recorded some bass and drums that were basically jams with no structure. When I was there they added keyboards, guitars and Shaun's vocals. When Martin deemed they'd had enough, he had the two-inch tape sent to Strawberry [Studios, Stockport] and then did a huge amount of work. When I was sent a CD a few months later, I couldn't believe what I was hearing. It was nothing like what I'd heard in the studio.

RYDER: We did the video E'd off our nuts. A mate let us use their club and we got our crew in – everybody in that video is from our corner of the Haçienda.

WHELAN: We stayed up all Saturday night and filmed it on Sunday morning. That video is how a lot of people first saw us. The Bailey Brothers just said, "Carry on like you did four hours ago at the Haçienda." They made it look a lot crazier than it really was. We looked a bit freaky. No wonder people avoided us. But we weren't bad, we were just boys from the suburbs.

BEZ: Everybody was suitably sweaty and it looks gritty. It was filmed in a great club in Manchester with a disco floor that flashed. Everybody was off their tits. Did that make it hard to shoot? I don't know, we were too out of it to notice.

WHELAN: When we made the album, there was a room at the back of the studio where we played dance music 24/7. One day in the pub Martin said, "You know that dance music you all listen to back there – 'Wrote For Luck' would suit that style." Tony Wilson hated the idea but agreed to try a remix.

RYDER: I'd come across Oakey [Paul Oakenfold] in the clubs. I heard "Jibaro" [by Electra], which was the first thing he did. Vince Clarke was the big name. He's a brilliant producer. So they gave Vince the A and Oakey the B-side, but from what I remember the DJs started flipping it over and playing the Oakey mix.

BEZ: We was lucky enough to be one of the first bands on the scene with the London firm. We used to go down to London and see what was going on in the acid clubs. We couldn't wait for it to come to Manchester. It was spreading upwards but the Cockneys were on it first through the Ibiza thing. We were there at the beginning because associates of ours at that time were the people bringing the stuff back to England.

RYDER: With E, Manchester went Technicolor. It had been black and white, then '87 comes along and the E and it went into wonderful Technicolor. It was a good place to be. It was 20 years since 1967 and it felt like the LSD thing again but with ecstasy. We were taking pills all the time.

VINCE CLARKE: Daniel Miller [Mute founder] was friends with their manager. He came to the Mute office and played me the video they had recorded in a club. It was a fantastic visual of that time, the excitement and the illegality. I said to the manager, "It looks like everybody in that audience is on E." He said they were. I thought that was really funny.

RYDER: We knew Oakey would do a mix for the clubs and Vince was selling records.

CLARKE: It was the first remix I ever did. At the time I was working with Flood on the Erasure stuff. I didn't fully understand how remixes worked but came up with the bassline, stripped the track out and then pieced it together again. Flood provided the groove. He had a shitload of drum loops he was messing about with.

DJ and producer Paul Oakenfold

WHELAN: Vince Clarke did the first one and I remember thinking it was incredible. We started trying to play it in the rehearsal room. Bez had the idea of getting a DJ do a mix, so that's how we made the approach to Oakenfold. We listened to dance music. We didn't want to became a dance band, but we did want to mix it up a little – we wanted to be a disco Velvet Underground.

CLARKE: They had a few remixes done. It's not competitive but you listen to the other remixes. Of course you think your own is better, but the interesting thing is whether it stays relevant. I have been approached recently to do a compilation of my remixes – apparently I've done 150. This was the first one and the label were dead set on using it.

RYDER: Because of Oakey's remix, we sold lots more copies of the album. After that, it was obvious that Oakey would produce the next album instead of just doing remixes.

WHELAN: The remix made a massive difference to us. This was the late '80s, when there was a lot of great pop that was very nice and clean. They weren't ready for the kind of thing we did, but the remix helped massively and we knew it would.

RYDER: After the remix, we adapted the live version so it was like a cross between the original version and the remix. That's what we do today still.

WHELAN: We finish the set with "Wrote For Luck" but it still makes me feel queasy, all hot and sweaty. It's the paradox at the end of a show – I feel good to reach the encore but I know what's coming next.

FACT FILE

Label: Factory
Released October 31, 1988
Written by Shaun Ryder, Paul Ryder, Gaz Whelan, Mark Day, Paul Davis
Personnel: Shaun Ryder (vocals); Mark Day (guitar); Paul Ryder (bass); Paul Davis (keyboards); Gaz Whelan (drums)
Produced by Martin Hannett
Recorded at The Slaughterhouse, Driffield
Chart: UK -; US -

The Factory Singles **is out now on London Records. Happy Mondays tour the UK in March and April to celebrate 35 years of *Pills 'N' Thrills And Bellyaches***

TIME LINE

Spring 1988 Happy Mondays compose "Wrote For Luck" during a post-Haçienda jam at their rehearsal space in Manchester. They record the track with Martin Hannett at The Slaughterhouse in Driffield that summer

October 1988 "Wrote For Luck" is released as the first single from *Bummed*, reaching No 7 in the Indie chart. The video, shot at Manchester club Legends, provides the UK with one of the first representations of acid house culture

September 1989 Remixes of "Wrote For Luck" by Paul Oakenfold and Vince Clarke are released as "W.F.L."

March 2026 "Wrote For Luck" remains a core part of the band's regular set as they tour the UK

TOM SHEEHAN; NAKI/REDFERNS

THE TWILIGHT SAD
APRIL 2026
WED 29 BRISTOL ELECTRIC BRISTOL
THU 30 LONDON ROUNDHOUSE
MAY 2026
SAT 02 MANCHESTER NEW CENTURY HALL
SUN 03 NEWCASTLE BOILER SHOP
TUE 05 GLASGOW BARROWLAND BALLROOM
WED 06 GLASGOW BARROWLAND BALLROOM
MYTICKET.CO.UK
A KILIMANJARO & FRIENDS PRESENTATION

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ROBERT FINLEY
UK TOUR - APRIL/MAY 2026
APR 29 BELFAST EMPIRE MUSIC HALL
MAY 05 LONDON ELECTRIC BALLROOM
MAY 06 NOTTINGHAM RESCUE ROOMS
MAY 07 NEWCASTLE THE CLUNY
MAY 08 LEEDS HOWARD ASSEMBLY ROOM
MAY 09 BRISTOL THEKLA
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Slippery People presents
STOP MAKING SENSE LIVE
A live recreation of the greatest concert movie of all time
FEBRUARY
06 LEEDS BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB SOLD OUT
07 LEEDS BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB SOLD OUT
13 GLASGOW SAINT LUKE'S SOLD OUT
14 EDINBURGH LA BELLE ANGELE LOW TICKETS
27 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY 2
28 LONDON ELECTRIC BALLROOM
APRIL
09 MANCHESTER ALBERT HALL EXTRA DATE ADDED
10 MANCHESTER ALBERT HALL
MAY
08 NOTTINGHAM RESCUE ROOMS
09 SHEFFIELD ELECTRIC
15 HOLMFIRTH THE PICTUREDOME
16 LIVERPOOL ARTS CLUB SOLD OUT
16 LIVERPOOL ARTS CLUB MATINEE SHOW ADDED
MYTICKET.CO.UK

WINTERSLEEP
Wishing Moon
TOUR
APRIL 2026
12 MANCHESTER THE DEAF INSTITUTE
14 LONDON THE LOWER THIRD

SON LITTLE
CITYFOLK TOUR 2026
WED 22 APRIL
JAZZ CAFE
LONDON

TYLER RAMSEY
2026 UK TOUR
Sun 29 March 2026
The Social
London

THE BOXER REBELLION
THURSDAY 26 MARCH 2026
ELECTRIC BRIXTON
LONDON

HALLELUJAH!

Louisiana soul man ROBERT FINLEY overcame his hardscrabble origins, loss and blindness to finally find success in his later life. Amazingly, he believes he still has much to prove. "Most people retire at 65," he tells Kevin EG Perry. "Hell, I came alive at 65."

Photo by JIM HERRINGTON

THE road to Bernice is littered with roadkill and burst tyres. Highway 167 runs straight through this tiny town in north Louisiana, where the street numbers don't make it out of single digits. Built around a sawmill in 1899, fewer than 2,000 people now call it home. As landmarks go, there's a post office, a water tower painted with the face of the Tin Man from *The Wizard Of Oz* and a black metal plaque, down near the Baptist church and the liquor store, bearing the name and biography of an "old school, guitar slingin' blues and soul man" named Robert Finley.

"I'm just glad I'm here to see it," says Bernice's most famous resident. "Most times you see a monument like that, it's in the graveyard."

A couple of minutes away, Finley's modest home is easy to find, owing to all the white limousines parked outside. The 71-year-old collects them, figuring that running them might make for a decent retirement plan. He occasionally still drives them, untroubled by having been declared legally blind over a decade ago.

"He can still see a little out of his left eye," explains his daughter and backing singer Christy Johnson. "People around here know to get out of the way when they see him coming."

Finley lost most of his eyesight in 2014, the year he turned 60, ending the carpentry business that had been his livelihood. Although he'd sung gospel, blues and soul since before he was tall enough to hold a guitar, he had never made a record until 2016's appropriately titled *Age Don't Mean A Thing*. The album brought him to the attention of The Black Keys frontman Dan Auerbach, who signed him to his Easy Eye Sound label and has since produced four Finley records in quick succession: each with distinct sounds but all lit up by a voice as rich as wine and as powerful as a howling wind.

"It's like a chainsaw through butter," says Auerbach. "His range is crazy. It's just so much fun to be in the studio with somebody able to sing falsetto and growlers and everything in between." ➤

Robert Finley: "I'm doing what I always wanted to do"

The success of those records has enabled Finley to tour internationally for the first time in his life, earning him a reputation as an electrifying live performer. A consummate, swivel-hipped showman with a preacher's righteous zeal and a knack for telling larger-than-life stories, he has won fans everywhere from European festival stages to an unlikely run to the semi-final of *America's Got Talent*. He brings his live show back to the UK for five dates this May.

"I'm doing what I always wanted to do," says Finley, taking a seat on a wooden dining chair in his pink-walled living room. Today he looks like he could have just stepped off stage, every inch the modern bluesman from the black leather stetson on his head to his blue denim suit and the cowboy boots on his feet. "Sitting on the porch waving at the cars going by gets old," he continues. "I like waking up every day and moving around, doing something that's exciting. If you sit around on your ass too long, when you're ready to get up you ain't gonna be able to! If I'm out there dancing, I'm getting my exercise."

It's still morning, but it's not too early for a little Southern hospitality. Finley finds a couple of glasses and gestures to the litre bottle of Crown Royal Canadian whisky sat on the coffee table next to an oversized novelty pink piggy bank. "Oh yeah, I'm gonna drink with ya," he says with a wide grin. Johnson fetches us a couple of bottles of Bud Light from the kitchen to chase the hard stuff.

It transpires that Finley's been drinking liquor since the age of 10, reasoning: "You've gotta give a body what it's used to." But he has always drawn the line at harder drugs. "To be honest, I think the best thing that could have happened to me was to get my break at a solid age," he says. "If I had got a break like this in my twenties or thirties, I probably wouldn't even be here." He chuckles knowingly. "Young people have a tendency to experiment."

It may have taken a long time for the world to pay attention to his talent, but that doesn't trouble Finley now. He's making up for lost time. "If you're going to die, you might as well die having done something," he says. "You've gotta get over the fear of dying in order to get to the enjoyment of living. Most people retire at 65. Hell, I came alive at 65."

"I ALWAYS WAS A POET. I LOVED TO MAKE SHIT RHYME"
ROBERT FINLEY

ROBERT Finley was born to sing the blues. He arrived in the world on February 13, 1954 and grew up on a farm outside Winnsboro, another rural Louisiana town about 100 miles southeast of Bernice. The seventh of eight siblings, he got used to wearing hand-me-downs. "I was the last boy, so by the time I growed into it the knees were already out of it," he chuckles. "But let me put it like this, we were poor and didn't know it. We didn't go hungry."

The family were sharecroppers, meaning they had to give much of their harvest to landowners. Historians have called the system "slavery by another name". As Finley puts it: "I learned at an early age you don't always get your share!"

On his 2021 record *Sharecropper's Son*, he documents a childhood where farming took precedence over school. "*Ain't no time for education/Too much corn in the field*", he sings on the title track. "*Ain't got time to go to school, y'all/We got too much work around here*".

Before he released that album, he played it to his oldest brother and sister – who have both since died – to get their blessing. "I wanted them to hear it before I put it out, to make sure this was the way it was," he says. "To the young people, it's history. To the older people, it's a trip down memory lane. Nowadays kids don't read no history book like we did, what little schoolin' we went to."

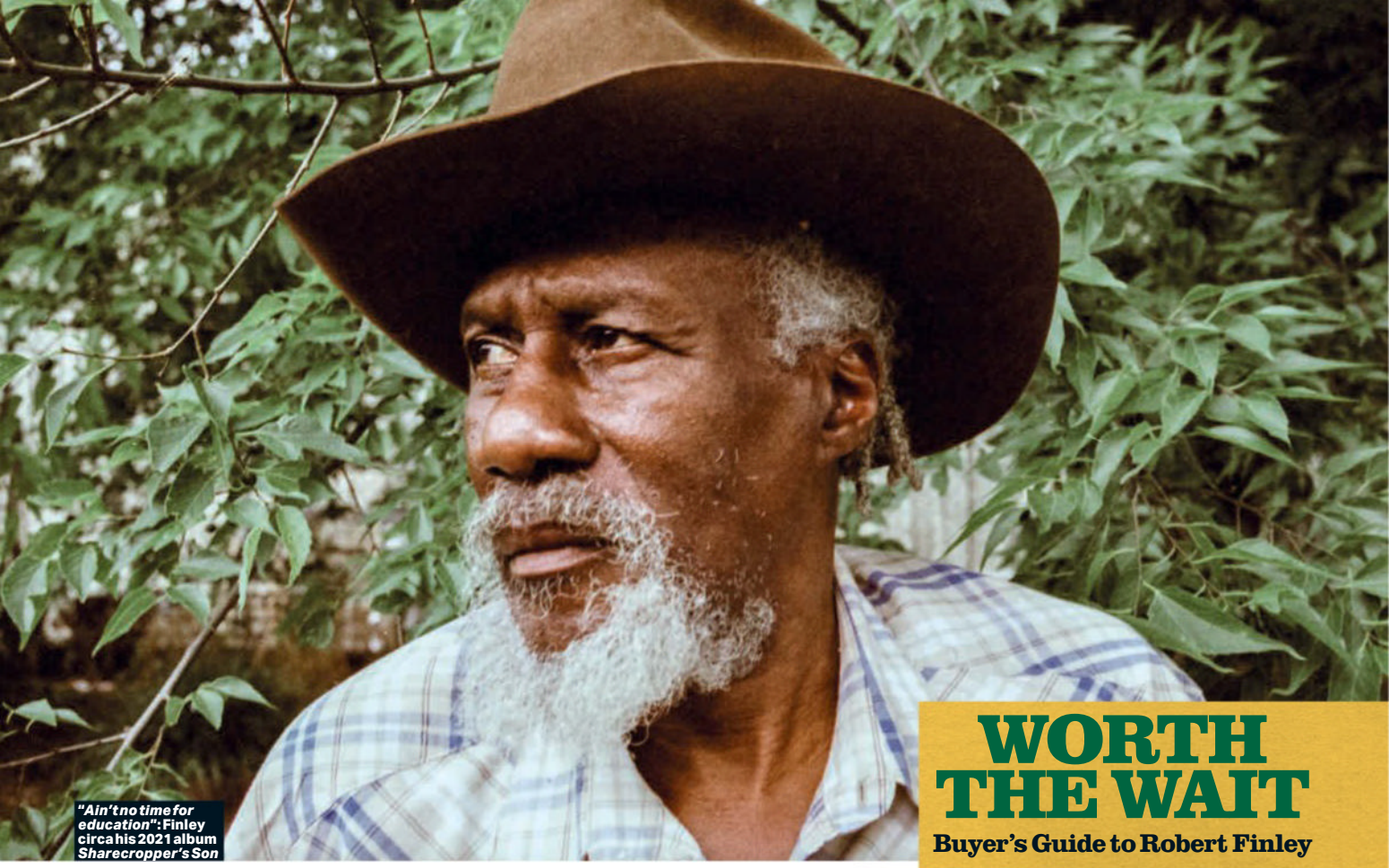
Finley's unwillingness to spend much time in the classroom was exacerbated by a lack of confidence in his teachers. He learned the basics of carpentry from his father, and one day at school he was called upon by the principal to fix a new lock to a door after someone had stolen money and candy. But Finley wasn't in class and when they found he'd skipped out to play dice he said he didn't see why he had to go back.

"The principal's supposed to be the smartest person there," he told his father. "If he don't got sense enough to put a lock on a door then he damn well ain't gonna be able to teach me nothing!"

At home, Finley's father forbade his children from listening to the blues, calling it "the devil's music". So it was at church that Finley first set his heart on learning to play guitar. "I can literally

PER OLE HAGEN/REDFERNS

"He really gets the crowd going": Finley at the Blues Heaven Festival in Denmark, November 10, 2023



"Ain't no time for education"*: Finley circa his 2021 album *Sharecropper's Son

say I'm living my childhood dream, because I would always sit on the front row of the church and watch the guy's fingers playing," he says. "That was my private prayer: 'Lord, I want to learn how to do this.'"

He got his first guitar at 10, started playing in a gospel group by 12 and by 15 had set off for New Orleans, sure he was set to make his living as a rock star. "I walked around with a guitar on my back like Hank Williams," he says, relaying tales of busking for construction workers so that they'd pay for his lunch. Without much of a repertoire, most of the songs he played he'd just make up as he went along. "I always was a poet," he says. "I loved to make shit rhyme."

Finley's vagabond troubadour days were cut short by tragedy. "My daddy got killed in a car wreck when I was 16," he says, swirling the whisky in his glass. "A truck had backed across the road and he ran into the side of it. It was him and his girlfriend, after him and my mom separated. They didn't even know she was in the car until the wrecker picked the car up and they said her head rolled out from under it."

Following his father's death, Finley took a serious look at his prospects. Many of his friends had gone off to fight in Vietnam and some were coming back in boxes. When he sang at their funerals, he learned that the families of those who died were given $20,000, a small fortune then, and their burial costs were covered.

"I had other friends getting killed in the streets and their parents had to walk around with a bucket taking up collection just to bury them," he says. "I thought: 'I'm gonna die either way, I might as well go in the army so when I die my mama won't have to go back into nobody else's field.'"

Finley enlisted in the US Army at the age of 19, but was never sent to Vietnam. "I guess they heard I was coming and they ended the war!" he says, laughing. Instead, his musical abilities impressed his commanding officers enough that he spent most of his time entertaining his fellow troops.

"I knew some James Brown and Isaac Hayes, but a lot of times I was still making songs up," he says. "I'd pick at the drill sergeant by singing: '*Everybody thinks I'm lazy/But God knows I'm just tired*'. The GIs knew how that felt."

After he was discharged, Finley went to ministry school but knew deep down that music, not preaching, was his real passion. He formed a quartet, Brother Finley And The Gospel Sisters, and proudly recalls his daughter Christy singing with them from the age of two. "I sang 'Trouble In My Way'," adds Johnson from the other side of the room. "I didn't know nothing about trouble then, but I know about it now!"

When gospel music didn't pay the bills, Finley fell back on his carpentry skills.

"I had a company called All In One Construction," he says. "There wasn't nothing about a house I couldn't do. Concrete, plumbing, I could build anything. Then I started to go blind. I couldn't see how to measure or do a straight cut anymore. I was forced into retirement and had my little pity party."

His doctors have recently recommended glaucoma surgery in an effort to preserve the little sight he has left. "I've got an appointment at 2pm to fill out some paperwork," he says. "They're trying to help out my eyes a little bit, but the only thing I'm doing today is signing my life away!"

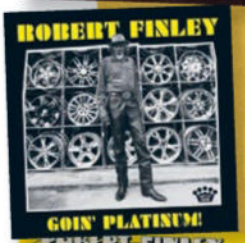
WORTH THE WAIT

Buyer's Guide to Robert Finley

AGE DON'T MEAN A THING

BIG LEGAL MESS/FAT POSSUM, 2016

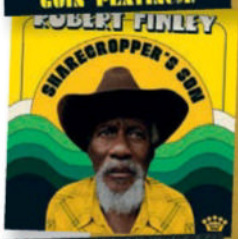
Finley's debut album, recorded at the age of 62, served up a classic Memphis soul sound, including a cover of the Bread hit "Make It With You". **7/10**



GOIN' PLATINUM!

EASY EYE SOUND, 2017

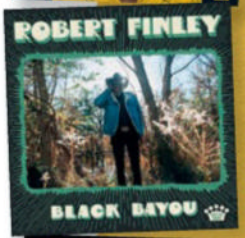
With the help of producer Dan Auerbach's songbook and Nashville's finest session musicians, Finley broadened his musical palette to include R&B stompers and retro funk boogies. **8/10**



SHARECROPPER'S SON

EASY EYE SOUND, 2021

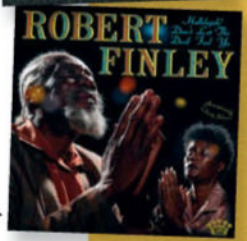
Finley returned to songwriting duties and a rootsier sound on this outstanding and deeply autobiographical soul and blues record. **9/10**



BLACK BAYOU

EASY EYE SOUND, 2023

An album with a darker, swampier edge as Finley's charismatic voice offered up tall tales in the Southern Gothic tradition. **8/10**

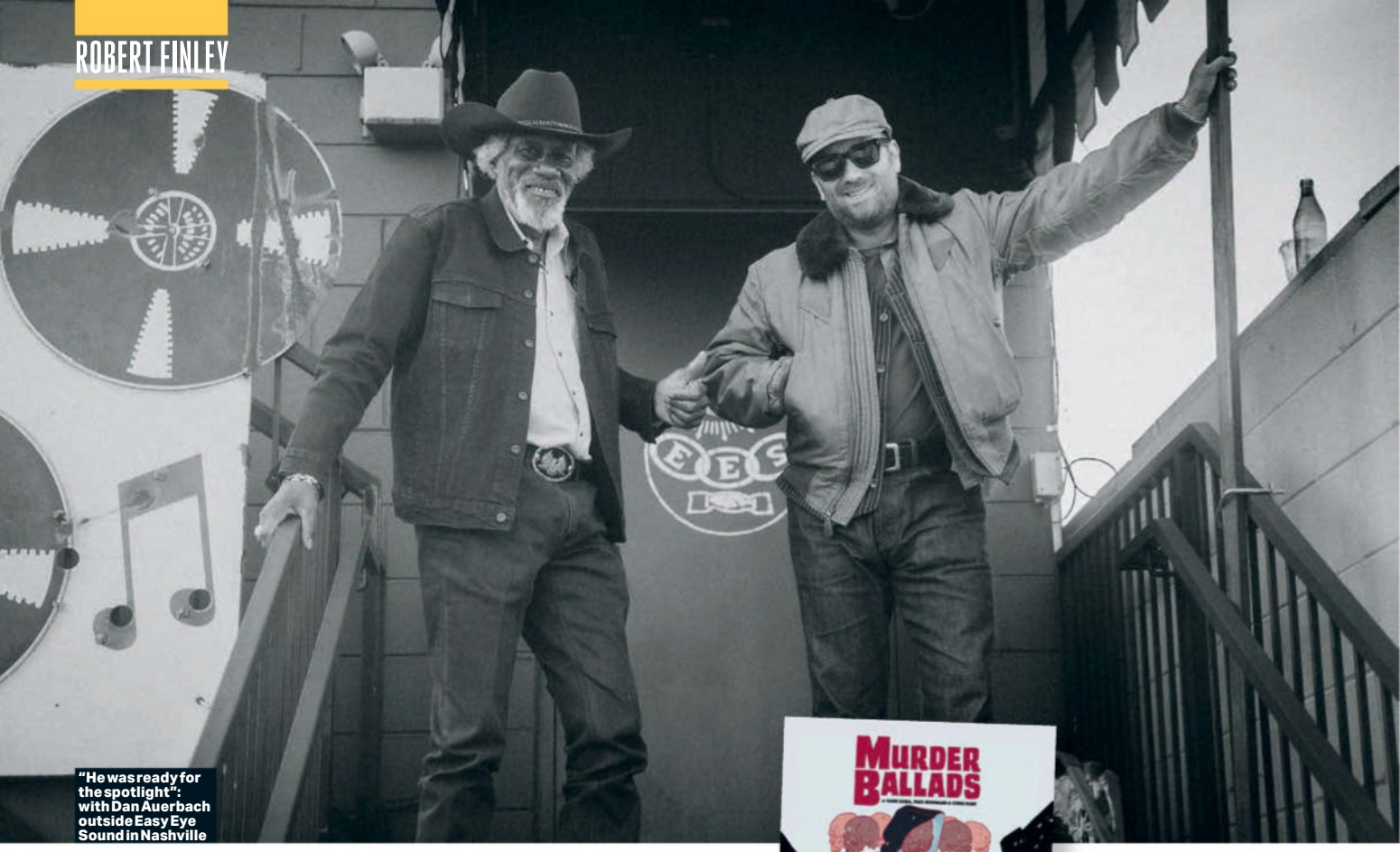


HALLELUJAH! DON'T LET THE DEVIL FOOL YA

EASY EYE SOUND, 2025

Finley took us to church, backed by daughter Christy Johnson and propelled by an infectious gospel groove. **9/10**

ALYSSE GAFKJEN



"He was ready for the spotlight": with Dan Auerbach outside Easy Eye Sound in Nashville

ANDY HAWKES

JOHNSON drives us to the medical centre about an hour away in Monroe, the local hub with a population around 50,000. Finley doesn't appear to be feeling any ill effects after his liquid breakfast and is in fine spirits after he's finished with his appointment.

"They say my right eye is a waste of time, but my left one is worth operating on," he says, cracking jokes. "We'll see... hopefully, we'll see!"

Next stop is Enoch's Irish Pub, a cornerstone of Monroe's music scene where Finley has been playing for decades. "That was before it went from a hobby to a living," he says, showing me the little corner where he'd play his guitar. "It would be a packed house and people would be sitting outside because they had speakers out there too."

The walls are covered with photos of various musical heroes, including Fats Domino, Townes Van Zandt and Rick Danko. While Finley orders bacon burgers and more beers, Johnson finds a couple of pictures of her father up there too. "'Guitar Slim' Finley," reads the caption on one. "North Louisiana proud!"

In 2015, not long after he was forced to retire from construction, Finley got the break he'd always dreamed about. A friend suggested he try busking at the King Biscuit Blues Festival in Helena, Arkansas, 200 miles northeast on the banks of the Mississippi. The same friend's daughter was running a food stall there, selling crawfish and alligator on a stick, and she told him about a jam session scheduled for one of the big stages.

Finley found the booker running the stage and managed to talk his way on during soundcheck. "The guy said: 'It's a rough crowd, either you're gonna get discovered or you'll be a laughing stock.' I told him I'd take my chances," Finley recalls. "I sung one song: '*A woman bought herself a tomcat/With fuzzy hair and a long shaggy tail/I know she loves the tomcat/Because she takes him with her everywhere/She has him trained to lick her feet/She has him trained to lick her face/And what she trying to train me to lick is a doggone disgrace*.' When I sang that people started coming from everywhere! The crowd got bigger and bigger and they didn't want me to stop."

Finley continued busking at various spots at the festival, earning a dedicated following along with hundreds of dollars in tips. "This guy came up and asked me if I wanted to do that all over the world, but I didn't pay him no mind," says Finley. "A couple of weeks later he called me up from the Music Maker Relief Foundation and invited me to their place in North Carolina. Then they called Fat Possum in Memphis and set up an appointment to go down and do my first album, *Age Don't Mean A Thing*."

"HE HAD ON HEAD-TO-TOE BLACK LEATHER"
DAN AUERBACH

Fat Possum in turn put Finley in touch with Auerbach, who was looking for a blues singer to record a soundtrack album to accompany Gabe Soria's graphic novel *Murder Ballads*. "I invited Robert to Nashville," says Auerbach. "He walked into the studio and he had on head-to-toe black leather. Black leather pants, a black leather cowboy shirt, a floor-length leather duster, a giant belt buckle, alligator boots and a big cowboy hat. I couldn't believe my fucking eyes. He was ready for the spotlight."

Auerbach had set aside four days to record the songs for *Murder Ballads*, but Finley knocked them all out in four hours. "Because it worked so well throwing songs at him, I thought it would be fun to throw him some more," says Auerbach. "I had some unreleased songs I had written, some I had written with John Prine, and Robert took them and made them his own."

Those songs became *Goin' Platinum!*, Finley's first album for Auerbach's label Easy Eye Sound. The opening track, "Get It While You Can", is a Prine-Auerbach composition. "Prine loved it," says Auerbach. "He loved Louisiana soul and R&B, so it felt like he was writing it for someone like Robert."

When *America's Got Talent* came calling, Finley performed "Get It While You Can", leading Simon Cowell to heap praise on him and say: "This could go through the roof for you."

It wasn't a stage Finley ever expected to find himself on. "To be honest, I never signed up for it," he explains. "A producer saw a video of me and reached out. I still had to do an audition but I knew I'd get on."

He has mixed feelings about the show. "The money wasn't that good, but the publicity was," he says. "Nobody got no money but the winner, because we were all competing for the million dollars. They took care of room and board, they took care of the trip and they took care of the food, but they're making millions of dollars and the artists ain't getting crap more than lunch. The exposure is what paid off."

He looks toward Johnson, who is finishing her burger, and smiles a fatherly smile. "Exposure is important," he says. "Now, with my daughter

travelling around the world with me, I'm trying to do the same thing for her that Dan did for me."

SINCE *Goin' Platinum!*, Finley has released three more Auerbach-produced albums: the autobiographical *Sharecropper's Son*, the swampy *Black Bayou* and his latest record, the gospel funk of *Hallelujah! Don't Let The Devil Fool Ya*. Johnson sang backing vocals on all these albums and at her father's urging takes on a more prominent role on the new one.

"The call and response they have is powerful on this record," says Auerbach. "I really feel like it elevates it in a very special way."

Johnson thinks the album captures something powerful about her father. "It's the gospel according to Robert Finley," she says after we get back in the car. "He's telling his testimony and giving God praise, because He has brought him a mighty long way in this music industry from where he came from."

Although she's been singing with her father in church and in gospel groups for as long as she can remember, Johnson never thought she'd end up touring with him professionally. "I did dream about it," she says. "My dad's mom used to collect vintage toy dolls and I'd line them up and sing to them. That's what I think about now, when I get nervous singing in front of big crowds of people. I go back to just singing to those dolls."

On stage with her father, she is consistently taken aback by his undiminished enthusiasm. "He really gets the crowd going," she says. "I tell him sometimes: 'Daddy, you need to sit your old tail down! You're dancing too much!' I tell him to take breaks, to sit down and get some water, but next thing you know he's up again dancing. I don't know where he gets the energy from. I feel like it's the crowd. The more they're involved, the more he just goes on and on."

Liam Hart, the guitarist in Finley's touring band, says something similar when he calls. "When we do that tune 'I Wanna Thank You' off the new record, Robert has been going into these spell-binding sermons of thanks at the end and he'll bring himself to tears," says Spratt. "That rubs off on us and the audience and it turns into this pure kind of euphoria and joy. It can be like a religious experience when he rolls into those moments."

"He's telling his testimony": with daughter and backing singer Christy Johnson

Day has become night and we're crossing the Ouachita River on the way to our final destination. Finley is keen to show off his home away from home in Monroe, a modern-day speakeasy known as Sanchez Happy Place. Hidden away over his friend's auto garage, we find a fully stocked private bar and venue. When we walk in, Finley is greeted warmly. A beer is pushed into his grasp, while in turn he produces handfuls of Crown Royal miniatures that he's apparently had secreted about his person all day.

After we knock the little bottles back, he tells me with a smile on his face that there's no contradiction between his love of hard liquor and his faith. "People ask me about drinking and doing gospel music," he says. "I say: 'If Jesus didn't want us to drink, he wouldn't have turned the water to wine!'"

He roars with laughter, but he's making a genuine point. To his father, gospel was sanctified music to praise the Lord, while the blues were the work of the devil. To Finley, it's all one and the same. "I've heard music in church that I would've danced all over the club to if I'd heard it there," he says. "The only difference I see between gospel and blues is if you say 'Oh Jesus' or 'Oh Lord' you've got gospel; if you say 'Oh baby' or 'Oh honey' you've got blues. The music ain't a whole lot different."

Whatever you call it, Robert Finley has it deep in his bones. "I try to sing about what people are dealing with on a day-to-day basis," he says. "They can call it the blues, they can call it gospel, they can call it what they want. I just call it the truth."

Hallelujah! Don't Let The Devil Fool Ya **is out now on Easy Eye Sound. Finley's UK tour begins at London's Electric Ballroom on May 5**

SOUL SURVIVORS

Robert Finley on the voices that inspire him

ARETHA FRANKLIN

"I just love the way she expresses herself in lines like '*Ain't no way for me to love you, if you won't let me...*' or '*I don't want nobody, sitting around me and my man...*'"

ISAAC HAYES

"He brought rock'n'roll into the church, or took the church to the juke joint, whichever way you want to put it."

JAMES BROWN

"I love James Brown and I love singing his songs. Doing 'I Feel Good' is a chance to show everybody the bottom of your shoes."

RAY CHARLES

"When I first went blind, I was thinking of guys like Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder. If they were born blind and could go on and do everything they've done, then I knew I'd be OK."

AL GREEN

"An incredible voice, and he's really the only person I know of that hasn't been publicly strung out on something."

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; ANTHONY BARBOZA/GETTY IMAGES; DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS; TONY EVANS/GETTY IMAGES; LEO BAUBY/TPLP/GETTY IMAGES

The Temptations

Co-founder Otis Williams traces six decades of the soul institution: "I can still pull a few moves!"

"I WAS never the lead singer and I didn't write that many songs, but The Temptations has always been my group," says Otis Williams. "Berry Gordy and Smokey Robinson always said if there was no Otis Williams, there would be no Temptations. Smokey used to call me 'Oak' – I was the big tree at the centre. I wasn't the falsetto or the baritone, I was right in the middle, the glue holding everything together."

Through numerous lineup changes, 30 members and some reunions, The Temptations produced several charismatic frontmen – David Ruffin, Eddie Kendricks, Dennis Edwards – but it was Williams who founded pop music's greatest boyband in 1960 and who still, at the age of 83, tours with an incarnation of the group. Williams has also become the band's historian, his memoir providing the basis for the hit NBC miniseries about the group's struggles. He's seen his fair share of tragedy: bandmate Paul Williams, ravaged by sickle-cell anaemia and alcoholism, committed suicide after leaving the band in 1973; Ruffin died in 1991, aged 50, after a crack cocaine overdose; Kendricks died of cancer a year later, aged 52, the same age that baritone singer Melvin "Blue" Franklin died in 1995.

"There's been a lot of heartache to document. There's also been a lot of egos to deal with over the years. I just wanted the records to sound as good as they possibly could." ***JOHN LEWIS***

The Temptations backstage at the Apollo, New York, 1964: (c/wise from bottom left) Paul Williams, Melvin Franklin, Cornelius Grant (music director), Otis Williams, David Ruffin and Eddie Kendricks

DON PAULSEN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

MEET THE TEMPTATIONS

MOTOWN, 1964

There's doo-wop, gospel and more on warts-and-all debut

We all ended up in Detroit but we were Southern boys, raised in the church. You can hear all that in our first album – doo-wop, gospel, even a touch of jazz. "Paradise" is pure doo-wop, Eddie Kendricks on the bass voice, Eddie on falsetto. "The Way You Do The Things You Do" was our first hit. I remember the rehearsal where Smokey passed out the lyrics. At first I thought his lyrics were kinda hokey. "*The way you smile so bright, you know you could have been a candle*". I'd never heard a lyric using such funny images. But that was Smokey's genius. He could turn silly images into poetry. Same with other lyrics like "It's Growing" on the next album.

In those days, it was all about singles, rather than albums. So this debut album features a few of our earlier singles that weren't hits, like "I Want A Love I Can See", with Al Bryant, along with the B-sides. "Isn't She Pretty", that was a rare song that me and Eddie co-wrote with Berry. I think we were trying to copy "The Way You Do The Thing You Do". That was how things were at Motown then!

THE TEMPTATIONS SING SMOKEY

MOTOWN, 1965

A celebration of their first great producer

We'd recorded a few singles, written by Berry and us, and we started getting a reputation as "Motown's no-hit wonders" until Smokey took us under his wing. He invited The Temptations to support the Miracles at the Harlem Apollo in 1964. He told us backstage, "I've got a great song for you, it's called 'My Girl'." We flew back to Detroit to record it.

Paul Riser wrote the amazing string and horn arrangements. He was a trombonist in the Funk Brothers but also a key orchestrator on so many Motown songs. We were on tour when we heard "My Girl" had reached No 1. I cried my eyes out. We received telegrams congratulating us from Jules Podell, who ran the Copacabana nightclub in New York, and also from Berry, Smokey, The Supremes and even from The Beatles. I still have all those telegrams now, in a frame!

This was also our first album with David Ruffin. He was a unique performer. We met him at "record hops", little promotional slots, where he'd perform his solo singles like "I'm In Love" and "Mr Bus Driver". They were great songs, but it didn't really happen for him. He fitted in with us perfectly. He was tall and thin, like us, but he had a real sense of showmanship. He could kick the microphone stand, drop to his knees and pick up the mic just as it fell!

GETTIN' READY

MOTOWN, 1966

Motown visionary Norman Whitfield enters The Temptations' orbit

I went back a long way with Norman. I remember him as the tambourine player with various acts for the Northern Recording Company, which was run by a great lady called Johnnie Mae Matthews. Norman played tambourine on a 1959 single called "Come On" that me and Johnnie Mae wrote for my band, Otis Williams & The Distants. Norman produced groups around the Detroit area before he came to Motown, but we all found it amazing that this tambourine player ended up as one of America's greatest songwriters and producers!

Smokey and Norman were very different figures. Smokey was all about melody and storytelling. He could sit at the piano and play you the chords of every song he wrote. You can hear that here with Smokey's songs on this album, like "Get Ready" and "Little Miss Sweetness" and "I've Been Good To You" – very well structured songs that tell stories.

Norman wasn't learned, like Smokey. He couldn't play you the songs on the piano. He was more of a groove guy, something you can hear on his songs like the original version of "Too Busy Thinking About My Baby", which he later gave to Marvin Gaye, and even more on "Ain't Too Proud To Beg". It's just two chords, but it's got a great feel and a real edge. Norman deliberately pitched the song a tone too high for David Ruffin to sing, so David had to really scream that lyric. You can hear the crack in David's voice, straining in the upper register. It gave the song a drama and urgency and a sense of anguish. Norman knew how to push those buttons.

THE TEMPTATIONS IN A MELLOW MOOD

MOTOWN, 1967

Ballads, bow-ties, jazz standards and showtunes: the Temptations get classy

When we started playing venues like the Copacabana – suits and ties, a real dress-up, classy venue – we had to work more jazz

Black, green and gold: The Temptations and The Supremes team up in 1968

standards and showtunes into our act. So *In A Mellow Mood* was an album of ballads and standards, produced by Jeffrey Bowen and Frank Wilson. We did another album of ballads many years later, *For Lovers Only*. Ballads were always what we were best at.

The range of voices and harmonies is great: Melvin's baritone on "Ol Man River". Eddie's falsetto on "A Taste of Honey" and "With These Hands", Paul's beautiful tenor on "Who Can I Turn To" and "For Once In My Life".

How we looked onstage was a crucial part of The Temptations. At this stage, David was the lead singer, Melvin was in charge of the money, Paul was in charge of the choreography and Eddie Kendricks was in charge of the stage uniforms. He had us dressed real nice. We loved the suits we picked up on tour in London. That's where we got a lot of our designs from. We looked great in jackets with that cut that British tailors call the suppressed waist, tight around the middle. It was in London where I first saw peak lapels, where the lower lapel points up higher and wider than the top one. Pretty purple, white shirts, five guys, all the same height, tall and slim, we looked fine.

Women were going crazy! It was the ballads that drove them wild. That's why we still love opening our sets with a song like "Hello Young Lovers" from *The King And I*.

DIANA ROSS & THE SUPREMES JOIN THE TEMPTATIONS

MOTOWN, 1968

The first of two collaborations between Motown royalty – and The Temptations' first UK chart-topper

I stayed one block away from the Brewster Projects in Detroit, where The Supremes grew up. I'd known Diana Ross since we were teenagers – we all knew her as "Diane"; I think Berry was the one who started calling her "Diana". I was very close to Florence Ballard. The Temptations and The Supremes were both signed to Motown in 1961, we both played the same record hops together, we both had years of no success. Berry was tempted to drop both of us by about 1963. Then The Supremes had a chart-topper with "Where Did Our Love Go" and went on to have – what was it? – seven *Billboard* No 1s in a row! They were the biggest pop act on the planet. Then we had a No 1 hit with "My Girl" and blew up. So it made sense for us to do an album together.

We had fun working out the harmonies. The producer was Frank Wilson and again Paul Riser wrote some beautiful arrangements. "I'm Gonna Make You Love Me" was terrific, a rare song where I sang a lead vocal. I also duet with Diana on our version of "This Guy's In Love With You", a live favourite. Our version of Smokey's "I Second That Emotion" was a big hit in England. I love our version of "Ain't No Mountain High Enough". This album was such a big success, particularly in England, that we did another collaboration with The Supremes the next year, featuring lots of covers – Sly Stone, The Band, The Four Seasons and a bunch of Motown classics.

UNCUT CLASSIC

CLOUD NINE

MOTOWN, 1969

Psychedelic soul meets the Motown hit factory

This was our first album without David Ruffin. Lots of people thought this would never work without him. They thought The Temptations were through. So we had to prove them wrong.

Everywhere you went at this time, you heard Sly And The Family Stone's first single, "Dance To The Music". It was a game-changer. It was R&B, it was fun, it was party music, but it also had a touch of that psychedelic rock thing. We were standing outside a nightclub in Detroit and I remember saying to Norman, we need to do something along these lines. Norman was initially reluctant. "You're crazy, this is just some passing fancy, everyone will have forgotten about it in a few weeks," that kinda thing. Norman was cocky! If it wasn't his idea, he wasn't interested. But then he started writing songs that were inspired by Sly Stone. I said, "Norman, I thought you didn't want to do this kinda stuff?" Ha ha! But we were surfing that wave.

Songs like "Cloud Nine" and "Run Away Running Child" are structured very differently from the likes of "My Girl" and "I Wish It Would Rain". As with "Dance To The Music", everyone in the band gets to sing a few lines in turn. Psychedelic soul was about one-chord grooves, you know, where ➤➤

SILVERSCREEN COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES

The right lines: The Temptations on *Top Of The Pops*, March 29, 1972, with new member Damon Harris (second right)

the music and the lyrics are more mood-based. The lyrics are so right in the pocket, so you had to free up space to make sure people could hear them.

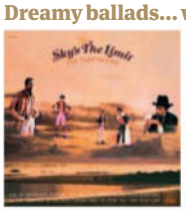
It wasn't all psychedelia. The version of "Grapevine" was heavy gospel. There were ballads on side two. There was plenty for everybody. Berry was worried if "Cloud Nine" was about drugs. Norman insisted that it was a state of mind. We dodged a bullet there! "Cloud Nine" was a slow burner. After a few weeks of nothing, it suddenly blew up, getting airplay on all sorts of stations, not just R&B ones. It was the first Motown single to win a Grammy.

Did I ever meet Sly Stone? Just the once, briefly. I was entering a hotel and Sly was walking out, with Bobby Womack. Bobby introduced us and Sly was like, "Oh man, I love me some Temptations, they're a big inspiration." So it's nice to know it was a two-way influence!

SKY'S THE LIMIT

GORDY RECORDS, 1971

Dreamy ballads... with a twist!



This was very much back to the ballads. We had got as deep into psychedelic soul as we could – *Puzzle People* and *Psychedelic Shack* are great albums, possibly better than *Cloud Nine* when it comes to that heavy funk stuff. Singles like "I Can't Get Next To You", "Ball Of Confusion", "Psychedelic Shack". We recorded "War" but Berry didn't want us to release it as a single because it was too political, so we let Edwin Starr release his version. There were lots of other socially conscious songs by Norman and Barrett Strong, like "Message From A Black Man" and "Slave".

But people were telling us, man, when are you going to come back with some ballads? "My Girl", "All I Need", "Since I Lost My Baby", "Please Return Your Love" – that kinda thing. So this was an album made up of ballads, but different to the ones we were singing in the 1960s. We released "Ungena Za Ulimwengu", a title that means "Unite The World" in Swahili, which wasn't a big hit, so we were disappointed with that. Norman wrote "Smiling Faces Sometimes", a great ballad, that he ended up giving to The Undisputed Truth, who had a hit with it... But "Just My Imagination" was one of Norman's great songs. It sounded good when we laid it down, but we were knocked out when we heard that big orchestral arrangement by Jerry Long. A beautiful showcase for Eddie's falsetto. It's a song that the women in the audience always want to hear us do, to this day.

There was a sadness to this album – it was the last one with Eddie, who left, and Paul Williams, who had to retire for health reasons. It was heartbreaking when we found out Paul killed himself a year later.

ALL DIRECTIONS

GORDY RECORDS, 1972

A powerful showcase for the band's vocalists, toplined by "Papa Was A Rolling Stone"

Eddie Kendricks left during the previous album, *Solid Rock*. I initially didn't want Damon Harris to replace him. He was 10 years younger than all of us, and he was too short and didn't look right in a line of six-footers! But it was obvious that he was perfect. He'd been in a Temptations tribute band, he knew all our songs, and could sing in any style.

All Directions really does push in all directions. You had an Ashford and Simpson waltz, "Love Woke Me Up In The Morning", that Damon sings in a beautiful falsetto. Richard Street sings Ewan MacColl's "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face". You had Isaac Hayes's "Do Your Thing" and Edwin Starr's "Funky Music".

We hated "Run Charlie Run" at first. It was a militant song about white flight. Norman insisted we sing "*the niggers are coming*" while impersonating a white person. We just never sang that line live onstage. The truth is that, at first, we never wanted to record "Papa Was A Rolling Stone". We heard Norman putting together an embryonic version and we all thought it would make a great single, but not for us. We were sick of that heavy funk stuff by that stage and wanted to get back to ballads. But, like a lot of Norman songs, it's simple but it contains such sophisticated backdrops, such detailed orchestral pieces, arranged again by Paul Riser. You heard it being played everywhere and it became huge.

> "Sly was like, 'Oh man, I love me some Temptations, a big inspiration'"

PHOENIX RISING

MOTOWN, 1998

A new lineup is rewarded with their first platinum-seller

After *All Directions*, I'm proud of so many great Temptations albums. *Masterpiece*, from 1973, has some great singles – "Plastic Man", "Hey Girl", "Law Of The Land". A few years later we replaced Norman Whitfield with Jeffrey Bowen for *A Song For You*. *Truly For You* in the 1980s has "Treat Her Like A Lady", a big hit in England. *Vagabond Heart* in the 1990s has "The Motown Song" with Rod Stewart, another big hit around the world.

One favourite is 1998's *Phoenix Rising*. It features Ron Tyson and Terry Weeks, who are still in the band. My favourite track is "Stay", which is based on a riff from "My Girl". We still do that in our live sets. We recorded that up in San Francisco with the great jazz musician Narada Michael Walden. That album took us to new R&B and swingbeat audiences and sold more than a million copies.

I'm still writing material. I've written a song called "Motown Salute" about the greatness of Motown – "*There will never, ever be/ A recording company like Motown*". A few days ago, I visited Berry Gordy and sang it to him. He's 96 years old and still a great friend, a beautiful man. He greeted it with the same Cheshire Cat smile he used to give to the songs he loved back in the day!

We'll be doing that song live. We still put on a hell of a show. I've had a few knee operations but I can still pull a few moves! I take care of myself. It's also amazing to see how touring has changed. I remember touring the South in the early days, where you had a rope down the middle of the theatre, with white fans on one side and black fans on the other. Guards in the middle. Imagine that! By the late '60s, those ropes had come down. You had black and white people mixing together, dancing to Temptations. That's the power of music.

The Temptations and The Four Tops tour the UK in June and July, including a show at the Royal Albert Hall on July 3

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IT'S NEVER OVER

After *Grace*, JEFF BUCKLEY retreated from fame into a bare Memphis shack, chasing darker sounds, deeper truths and a new creative path. As a new documentary confronts the realities of his life, family, friends and collaborators reflect on the restless search and the fragile rebirth. "He was trying to figure out where he fit in the universe spiritually," they tell Nick Hasted. "He was trying to make his *A Love Supreme*."

Photo by PAUL NATKIN

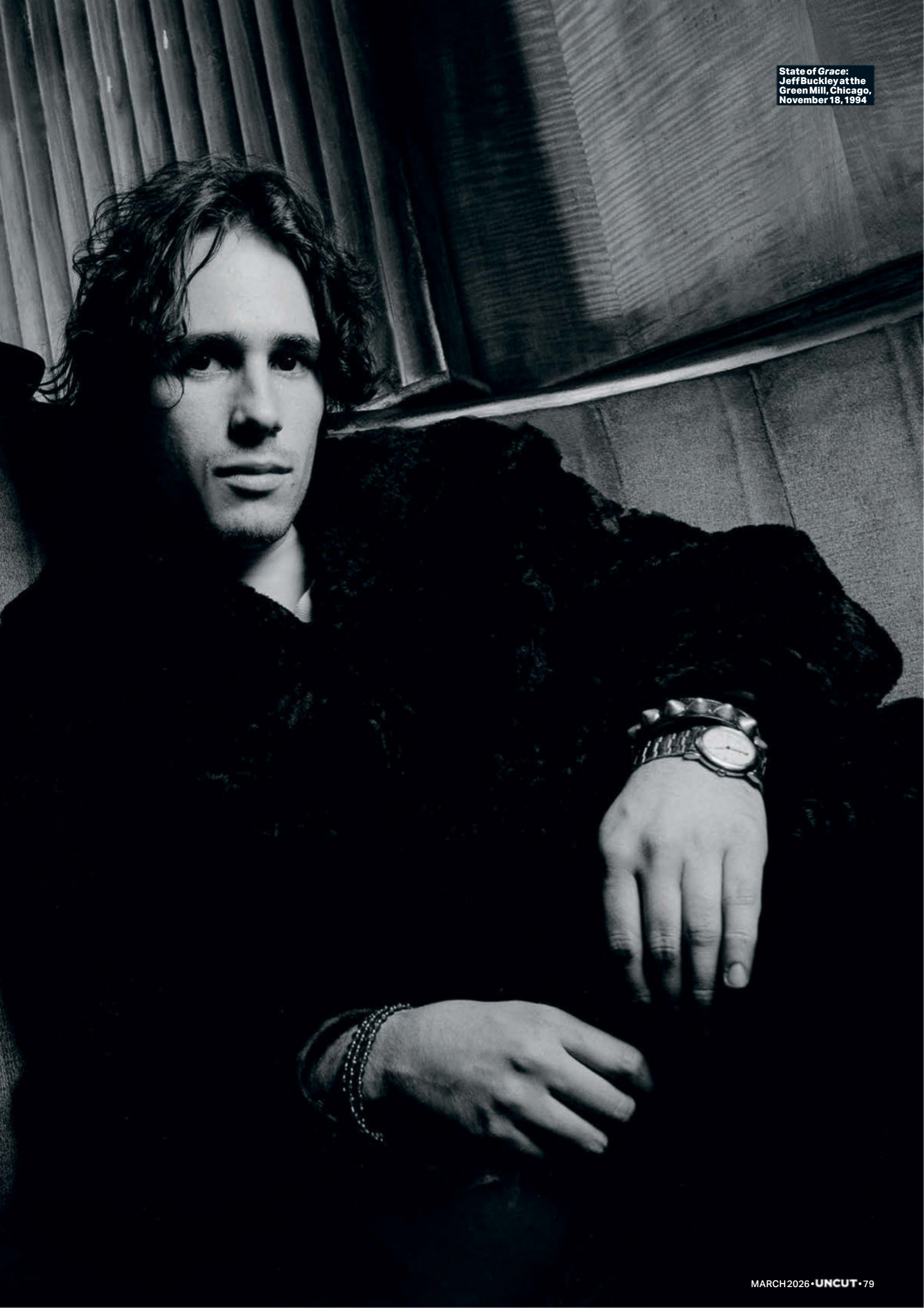
DURING the final months of his life, Jeff Buckley lived simply in a sparsely furnished shotgun shack in Memphis. Though he was signed to Sony and already a star in Europe, his only significant possessions at 91 North Rembert Street were his acoustic guitar, a boombox and black-bound notebooks with piratical skull and crossbones covers, filled with closely inscribed black ink comprising journals, sketches and lyrics. This was the raw material for the long-awaited follow-up to his debut album *Grace*, which was finally coming together.

"He spent a lot of time meditating, sanding the floor of that house – that's a meditation in itself – and shedding his connections to anything that depended on his fame," says Buckley's mother Mary Guibert. "It was three years since *Grace*, so he'd had plenty of time to think. He literally wanted to erase everything that he'd done on *Grace* and release something very shocking, new, guttural and real to him. He knew the album he wanted to make."

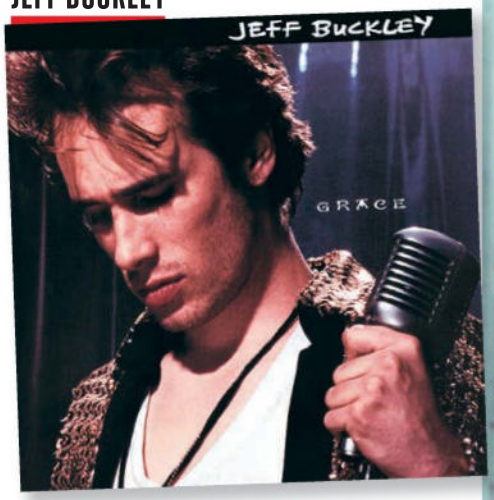
Buckley's proposed second album *My Sweetheart The Drunk* began with producer Tom Verlaine in New York and Memphis. But these sessions were scrapped and Buckley started over in Memphis, working on home demos. He appeared to be progressively breaking away from the breathy intimacy and sweet ecstasy of *Grace* towards heavier, harder sounds and deeper spiritual transports in the vein of his hero, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

"If you write *Grace*, you've got to follow that up," says Buckley's best friend, Fishbone's Chris Dowd. "The sophomore jinx weighed heavily and freaked him out. He couldn't just summon the muse like Prince, with his endless confidence. Jeff was broody like Kurt Cobain, who had to go to dark, weird places to get the muse to show up."

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES



State of *Grace*: Jeff Buckley at the Green Mill, Chicago, November 18, 1994



"The sophomore jinx freaked him out": Buckley in Atlanta, August 1994

But on May 29, 1997, just as his band arrived in Memphis to start concerted work on his new music, Buckley's evolution was cut short when he accidentally drowned swimming in Wolf River, a deceptively treacherous tributary of the Mississippi.

"By all accounts, *My Sweetheart The Drunk* might have been a record that people hated," says Dowd. "Jeff could have very well been a one-record thing, like Terence Trent D'arby. That scared the shit out of him. I also think that in Memphis, right before the accident, he'd settled into being comfortable if that happened."

This struggle to settle on a future path is captured in director Amy Berg's new documentary, *It's Never Over, Jeff Buckley*, which employs rare footage, journals and voicemail recordings to bring Buckley's own voice back to life. Using interviews with Mary Guibert and girlfriends Rebecca Moore and Joan Wasser, the character of a charismatic, courageous though vulnerable young man becomes vividly clear.

It offers proof that a cruelly abbreviated career still has a long way to run.

"Because of 'Lover, You Should've Come Over' going viral and connecting with Gen Z and Amy's film, Jeff is a household name now," says Buckley's bandmate, guitarist Michael Tighe. "It's very beautiful to see him finally get his flowers on the scale he deserves."

"Certain types of artists speak to that child inside of us that we still hope is there and try to protect, that innocence and honesty and yearning," says Dowd. "That's what Jeff captured in *Grace*. I just want people to remember what a gift he was as a human being. Take the guitar and the voice away, and there was a beautiful person – tough and wilful and opinionated and incorruptible and musically pious, fully sensitive, misunderstood, manipulated and emotionally taken advantage of. That's why people obsess with [his music], because it was so vulnerable and real."

ON the strength of his vaulting, wondrous vocal gifts, Sony put Jeff Buckley in the studio to start work on *Grace* in 1994, armed with only four original songs (eventually rising to seven, plus three covers).

Along with his elastically virtuoso guitar playing, his talents had been evident growing up in Anaheim, deep in California's conservative Orange County. "I'd tuck him in at night and he'd be lying down with a guitar on his chest, sound asleep with his fingers moving on the fretboard," says Guibert. "He would lay across the speakers when his [step-]dad would play Led Zeppelin and his little body would tremble with the sound. He let music consume him."

Buckley was a scuffling session guitarist when he met Chris Dowd in 1990 and they forged a bond later commemorated on "Dream Brother". According to Guibert, Buckley didn't start songwriting till he left home to study at LA's Guitar Institute. Dowd helped him develop this fledgling skill, but doubts Buckley felt about his miraculous voice went still deeper here.

"One night after a very heavy conversation we stayed up till 6 in the morning, fucking around, getting serious, writing and talking," says Dowd. "I had this idea for this song 'Despite The Tears' and the way the progression crescendos, the part Jeff actually wrote, is very similar to 'Lover, You Should Have Come Over'. So he was already trying to suss out how to write that. Jimmy Page was baked into Jeff's [writing style] too. It was with writing that he found his own original voice. I think he had that ability all the time. But the hard part is trusting yourself. And he didn't trust himself."

> "HE USED TO SING ME TO SLEEP, IT WAS MAGICAL"
> REBECCA MOORE

Buckley responded to being signed by Sony by withdrawing into himself – evidence of his constitutional aversion to outside pressure. His low self-confidence may also have stemmed from the wounding absence of his father, Tim.

Artist Rebecca Moore, Buckley's girlfriend when he moved to New York in 1992, recalls how his writing soon fell away. "Jeff had very shaky self-esteem, guilt feelings and imposter syndrome," she tells *Uncut*. "Once he signed, he stopped working on music at home. That was a real heartbreak. I could just see him shutting down, now that an audience was watching. Whereas he used to sing me to sleep and it was magical."

Grace's slow-burn success following its August 1994 release was built on more than two years of touring with a new band: guitarist Michael Tighe, bassist Mick Grøndahl and drummer Matt Johnson. That relentless itinerary proved a crucible for a tougher sound, but also reinforced a freeze on new songs. Buckley described the tour's creative inertia to *Juice* magazine: "I spent two years not thinking... a very natural way of

DAVID TONGE/GETTY IMAGES

Jeff Buckley and band from *It's Never Over...*: "He went to places I've never heard him go before"

The young Jeff (left) with his mother Mary Guibert

being... like being a dog." His old songs at least shape-shifted nightly, "as giving and liquid as your emotions".

"He seemed happiest on the road, even though it was gruelling," says Tighe. "He liked that circus lifestyle, going from one town to the next and just performing every night. I felt like when he was on stage he felt his purpose even more so than in the studio or being a songwriter. Singing live was what I think he felt he was meant to do."

There were memorable nights, especially in Europe, where *Grace* made Buckley a star. "There was a show in Belgium that I still sometimes wake up thinking about. I don't even know if it was recorded, but something amazing happened that night, our chemistry as a band was all working and Jeff went to places vocally I've never heard him go before, legitimately sounding like Nusrat."

In *It's Never Over, Jeff Buckley*, Buckley's friend Ben Harper recalls an equally indelible moment at France's 1995 Eurockéennes festival when, following his own exhilarating set, Buckley raced over to watch Page & Plant. Aerial footage sees him scaling the precarious speaker rigging, beckoning Harper to follow: a reckless, death-defying move, foreshadowing his final, fatal swim.

"When I spoke to Ben, a light went off for both of us," Berg says. "We realised that it wasn't actually funny, and that it connected to the overall journey that Jeff had with Zeppelin, impulse control and being totally lost inside a song."

It also sounds like Rebecca Moore's first dates with Buckley, when he escorted her home and ended up at Coney Island, taking the train all the way.

"He'd say, 'We don't have to get off at our stop. We can keep going,'" she says. "And climbing the rigging is in character. God rest his life, every time he crossed Houston Street, he just didn't have that brain thing where you're like, 'I better be careful here.' It was, 'If I'm scared, I'm gonna go full throttle.' For him, going to these extremes was a way of empowering everyone. Jeff dared you to come along into this fearless state. So when Jeff climbed up those speakers, yes it was him having to get that sound in every pore of his body, but I think he would've been so overjoyed if he started a movement and everybody climbed up with him to hang off the rafters, because he wanted all the people who felt like him to come together. The people who loved his music did. They all saw themselves in him – and that huge emotion he put out."

BUCKLEY'S band broke up after a last Australian tour in Spring 1996, as drug use and personality clashes took their toll. The elusive second album now had to be addressed.

"*Grace* really reflected Jeff's innocence, he had been writing those songs since he was 17, in some ways," says Tighe. "His voice is angelic and the album at times feels quite holy. Now he wanted to show people his darker, angrier side. He wanted to show the world he was a fan of Bad Brains and Gang Of Four and very aggressive music. That's why we would do these 15-minute encores of [Big Star's] 'Kanga Roo'. He didn't wanna be boxed in as the pretty boy with the angelic voice. No way."

Tighe believes Buckley spurned commercial imperatives, despite Grace's middling North American sales. "He was making the second album for himself and the band, he wasn't thinking about audiences. In fact, I

"I'M HAPPY FOR JEFF"

Director Amy Berg on her new documentary, *It's Never Over, Jeff Buckley*

"I DON'T think there has ever been a film about Jeff that matched him on any level," says filmmaker Amy Berg. "I wanted to create an immersive experience for everyone."

The film assembles childhood photos, unseen footage, Buckley's freewheeling journals and copious voicemail messages which, for ex-girlfriend Rebecca Moore, were too painful to play back until now.

"I still had this wall up of 'You'll never be able to listen to those things. You'll never be able to even listen to his songs again'," she says. "I thank the film for forcing me out of that. Mostly I'm happy for Jeff, because his voice is the throughline in his scribbles and musings, and his music is the driving force to him telling his own story."

In a cathartic scene, Berg plays Buckley's last call to his mother Mary Guibert, who weeps as if he's talking in real time. Moore, Guibert and Joan Wasser are key witnesses in a film with pronounced female energy. "Jeff was a feminist before men were feminists," says Berg. "He was in touch with his masculine and feminine side in a profound way."

COURTESY OF MAGNOLIA PICTURES

Frozen in time: Buckley (left) in a still from *It's Never Over...*

was at the 2A bar with him in New York and he said, 'I want this second album to scare people.'"

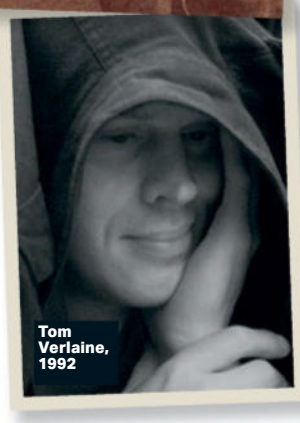
Buckley was insulated from major-label disquiet by the tight circle of believers among Sony's higher-ups. "They thought the sun shone out of Jeff's ass, as a rainbow!" laughs Dowd. "They knew not to throw it out there, they were willing to wait."

The new album's initial direction grew from Buckley's friendship with the Patti Smith Group, indicating the circles he now moved in.

"I'd hang out at New York's Lakeside Lounge with Jeff and talk about doowop," says Lenny Kaye. "Then when we played Lollapalooza as Patti returned to performing, Jeff sat cross-legged by the stage beaming positive energy. She took inspiration from that."

Dropping by Electric Lady studios in early 1996, Buckley contributed to Smith's Gone Again album, adding the Indian esraj's drone to 'Fireflies'.

"Then on 'Southern Cross', we wanted someone to be the song's boy leaping from the cliff into the unknown," says Kaye. "Jeff was that voice."


Tom Verlaine, 1992

Tom Verlaine played with Buckley on "Fireflies" and the singer promptly asked him to produce *My Sweetheart The Drunk*. "We were so in awe of *Marquee Moon*," says Tighe. "We were obsessed with the two guitar parts and really wanted that sound for the album."

Pre-Verlaine rehearsals in Sag Harbor, Long Island, though, proved disastrous. "That was an epic fail," laughs Tighe. "It was a beautiful old house on the main street, but we didn't soundproof it enough. We rehearsed maybe three times then the police would come because the neighbours complained. We ended up making fires in the fireplace, drinking beer, looking into the fire and listening to music. It was like we were Long Island roommates. Now those are fond memories, but it wasn't super-productive."

The sessions with Verlaine took place at New York's Sorcerer Studios in June 1996, then at Memphis's analogue Easley-McCain Studio in February 1997. The pair parted on good terms when it became clear that Buckley was still far short of full power.

"When we first got in with Tom, the band weren't quite ready, because we had a new drummer Eric Eidel and Jeff hadn't finished a lot of the songs," says Tighe. "Some of them are great, like 'Opened Once'. But you can tell he doesn't fully believe in some of the others."

The likes of "Yard Of Blonde Girls" are closer to conventional '90s alternative rock than the sui generis *Grace*. "He was very inspired by [Memphis punk band] the Grifters and we loved Nirvana and Soundgarden," says Tighe. "The music got darker and more angsty. I think we were trying to fit in more with grunge culture, which was jaded and nihilistic when we were out there playing [Nina Simone's] 'Lilac Wine'."

Idol gossip: with Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan at Town Hall, New York, October 7, 1995

Polished by *Grace* producer Andy Wallace, the posthumous *Sketches For My Sweetheart The Drunk* showcases the Verlaine sessions, which at their best now sound like worthy follow-ups to Buckley's debut — especially when he takes centre stage. With its references to "*nail-bombs*" and "*the violence of a nation*", "The Sky Is a Landfill" is a lyrically acerbic protest against a corrosive society, sounding closer to grunge than the ethereal otherworldliness of Grace.

"That's one of the strongest lyric-wise, looking at people and saying, you're just mindlessly consuming," says Guibert. "'*Turn your head away from the screen, it will give you nothing more*'. This is in '96! Jeff was prophetic."

> "HE WAS AN AESTHETE. HE DIDN'T OWN A TELEVISION!"
> MARY GUIBERT

The liquid, low-end soul of "Everybody Here Wants You" and the brooding, sepulchral ambience of "You & I" present different aspects of the singer. The highlight, however, is "New Year's Prayer", whose drifting mystique allows Buckley to truly scale Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's vocal heights.

"*Grace* was an emotional statement," says Dowd. "*My Sweetheart The Drunk* was leaning towards being a more spiritual statement. You think of that Qawwali, Sufi music that he was trying to understand on things like 'New Year's Prayer'. It seems he was trying to figure out where he fit in the universe spiritually. He was trying to make his *A Love Supreme*."

FOLLOWING the aborted Verlaine sessions in Memphis, Jeff Buckley moved into 91 North Rembert Street. He lived modestly, revisiting the relaxed pleasures of playing at East Village hangout Sin-é when he first hit New York with a similar informal residency at Barristers bar. Here in the South, only the Grifters really knew him. His East Coast celebrity fell away. Seemingly craving an ordinary life, he even applied to be Memphis Zoo's butterfly keeper. He was "like a kitten that would go from house to house...and get fed there too," said record shop manager Andria Lisle of Buckley's ready charm with new friends.

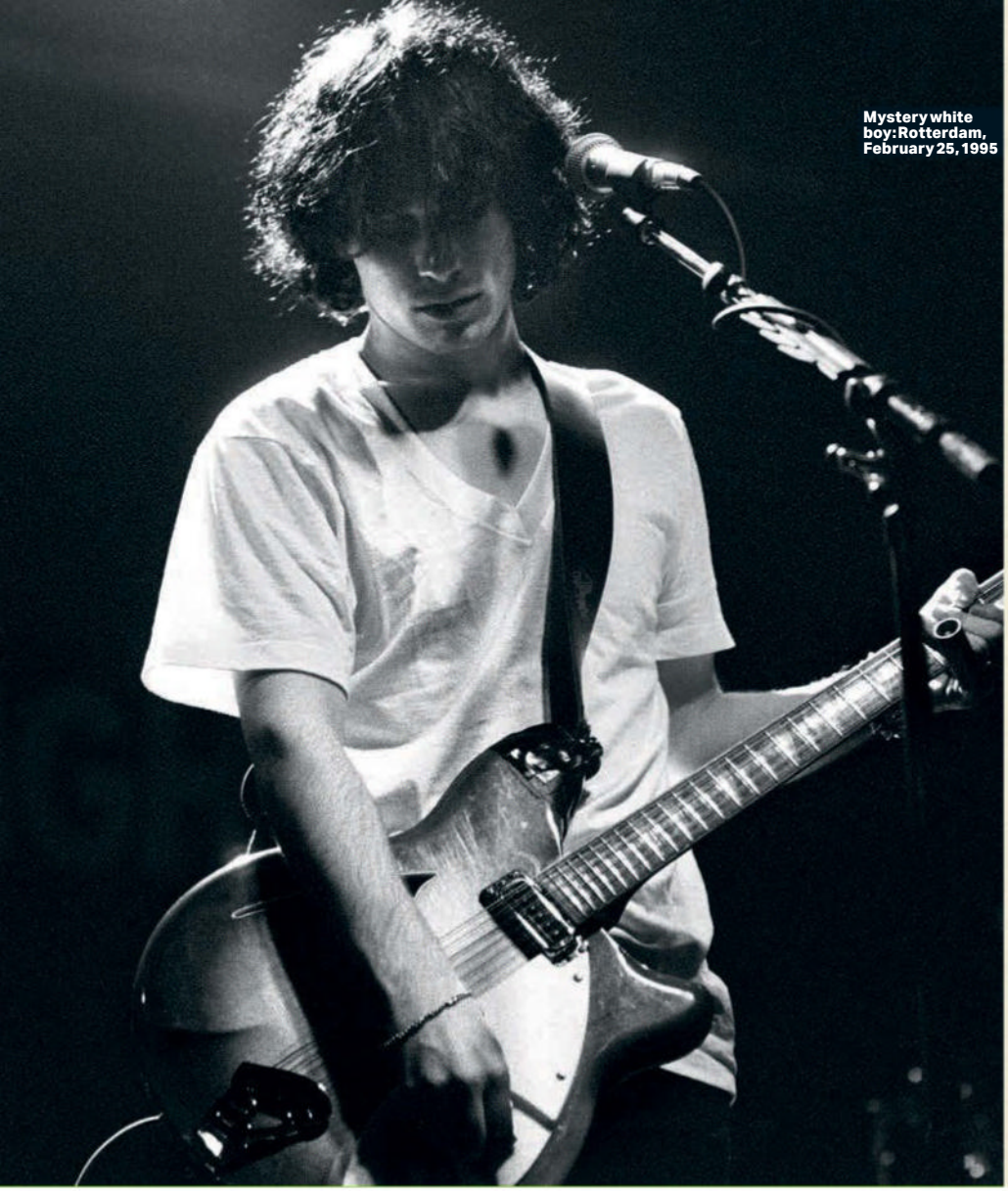
Rebecca Moore sees a larger picture. "During his last few years, he was constantly experimenting with being in and out of society – not just in Memphis. There's a certain freedom in being unknown. I even have a message from him where he says: 'I need to disappear.'"

Guibert considers why her son welcomed anonymity. "He told me that once he was riding his bike, pulled up at a red light, and somebody said, 'Hey, are you Jeff Buckley?' He drove away as fast as he could. He wanted to be where he wasn't anybody's shooting star or meal ticket."

Most of Buckley's loved ones never saw his new lodgings while he was alive. "It was spartan," says Guibert of the white-board, blue-trimmed house. "Just a mattress and blankets, candles, little tchotchkes, a green velvet couch that he'd picked off of the kerb on trash day, pots and pans and his four-track. He was a total aesthete. He rejected possessions! He didn't own a television!"

"The thing I remember most was the overgrown lawn," says Tighe. "He used to lie in the middle of it, he told me. It looked like

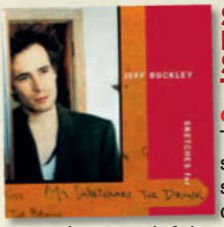
JACK VARTOOGIAN/GETTY IMAGES; DAVID TONGE/GETTY IMAGES



Mystery white boy: Rotterdam, February 25, 1995

AFTER *GRACE*

Buyer's Guide to Buckley's posthumous releases



SKETCHES FOR MY SWEETHEART THE DRUNK

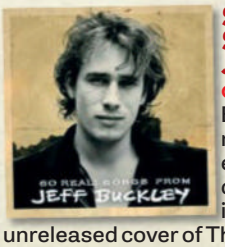
COLUMBIA, 1998

The Verlaine sessions and subsequent Buckley demos provide sometimes satisfying blueprints for *Grace*'s fantasy studio sequel. **8/10**

LIVE À L'OLYMPIA

SONY INTERNATIONAL, 2001

The most valuable of endless live albums includes Nina Simone's "That's All I Ask" amid landmark Paris shows, adding a bonus duet with Azerbaijani Mugham singer Alim Qasimov, the stuff of Buckley's Qawwali-adjacent dreams. **7/10**



SO REAL: SONGS FROM JEFF BUCKLEY

COLUMBIA, 2007

Best of Buckley's now improbably extensive discography, including an unreleased cover of The Smiths' "I Know It's Over". **7/10**

something from *Alice In Wonderland*." There, Buckley could hide in the long grass and dream.

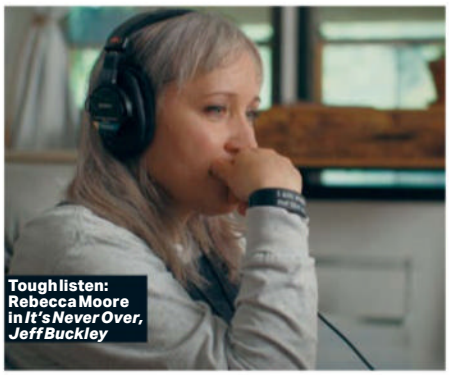
It was also here that the writing logjam really broke, as Buckley filled tapes with home demos of brand-new songs. Released on *Sketches For My Sweetheart The Drunk*, these raw new recordings mostly comprise harsh lo-fi experiments, from the bucking feedback of "Murder Suicide Meteor Slave" to a symptomatically brutal cover of Genesis's "Back In N.Y.C.", from *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway*. If anything, he was leaving *Grace*'s template further behind for what Tighe calls "the new sound", his guitar more Sonic Youth than Johnny Marr.

"He sent the whole band his four-track recordings the week before we were to meet him in Memphis," says Tighe. "He left a voicemail saying, 'It's starting to feel like it did when I was working on *Grace*.' When I got the tape, I felt we were on our way. It was so beautiful how 'Gunshot Glitter' incorporated the Judy Garland and Liz Frazer influence in his singing. I got emotional hearing the Genesis cover too, because I thought perhaps he was missing New York and ready to re-enter the world after this time of soul-searching and isolation. Towards the end it seemed like he was going through some type of rebirth, within himself and musically. I'm sure there were some dark confrontational moments, but he sounded pretty ecstatic about making music again."

Towards the end of *It's Never Over, Jeff Buckley*, the principals discuss their final phone calls from Buckley, some recordings of which are played in the film.

Two very different conversations stand out for Rebecca Moore, who was by then no longer in a relationship with Buckley, though they were still friends.

"He called first thing on New Year's Day, full of hope. He just said, 'You gotta come to Memphis. The sky is so blue.'" A second call the day before he coincidentally died was less sanguine. "He was struggling. He started by saying, 'The music's going well.' But as far as us and people in his life, he was very distraught, very anguished. I felt like he was having a mental health struggle – I wouldn't deem it a crisis. But he was struggling hard to hold some stuff together and sobbing on the phone."



Tough listen: Rebecca Moore in *It's Never Over, Jeff Buckley*

Buckley was eager to meet his band in the rehearsal studio the next evening to start work on the new record. Getting lost en route with his new assistant Greg Foti, he stepped into the muddy, rubbish-strewn river in his clothes and boots as dusk fell, singing and backstroking blissfully till the backwash from a tug likely took him under, where he drowned.

"He was embracing life to its fullest," says Moore. "That's the irony of it. Also he had an audience, and whenever he was with someone else, he would act out a little more. He wanted to show you what it's like to be totally free. If you're a person with a sense of safety or responsibility, you might hang back a little. But I think when he stepped in that river, he was like, 'I'm alive.' I'm glad he had that as his last moment. It was probably very beautiful."

As to the unfinished music he left behind, Moore is similarly optimistic. "In the last conversation he was rattling off the names of the songs, 'This one's 'Sky Blue Skin', then there's this one...' He was just so excited about it. I said, 'Keep going. I can't wait to hear it.' If you really knew Jeff, you knew that everything was just beginning."

It's Never Over, Jeff Buckley opens in the UK and Ireland on February 13

MAGNOLIA PICTURES; ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS

TRY FOR THE

In 1966, THE VELVET UNDERGROUND AND NICO brought together the worlds of avant-garde art, European cool and downtown rock'n'roll in one explosive package. Sixty years on, the survivors share tales of drugs, breakdowns, burnouts, blocked toilets and hospital beds – and, of course, the creation of some of the most important music ever made. "We only did things our way," learns Tom Pinnock. "We were arrogant, perhaps, in thinking we knew best. We were also right. We did know best..."

KINGDOM

"We broke every fucking rule we could": (l–r) Sterling Morrison, Lou Reed, Nico, Moe Tucker and John Cale in 1967

VELVET UNDERGROUND COLLECTION, #8105, DIVISION OF RARE AND MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS, CORNELL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

"One of those magic, crazy moments where everything was coming together": The Velvet Underground and Nico at Andy Warhol's Silver Factory, 1966. Photograph © Billy Name Estate/ Courtesy Dagon James

FIVE storeys above Manhattan's East 47th Street, worlds are colliding. It's January 3, 1966, and this is The Velvet Underground's first rehearsal with Nico. It is also their first session at their new manager Andy Warhol's Silver Factory studio space: a rare moment of overlap between the avant-garde and rock'n'roll, between pop music and pop art, between the impoverished depravity of Downtown and the city's high society, and between Europe and America.

The results of this three-way union will be powerful and revolutionary. Throughout 1966, The Velvet Underground will develop their elegantly brutal sound and pioneering audio-visual performances, disgust the West Coast, blow the minds of students, celebrities and society figures, record the boundary-breaking *The Velvet Underground & Nico* LP and set the future of music in motion for decades to come.

"When Lou sat me down and read me the lyrics, I realised how well-crafted these songs were," John Cale told *Uncut* in 2009. "I was caught up in their rhythms and what they were about. I was flabbergasted. I'd never heard anything like them... I began to think there was an opportunity here to do something that was different to everything else that was going on."

Things had happened quickly to reach this point. Nico and Warhol had met just a few months earlier and encountered the group in the dying days of 1965. The Velvets themselves had only existed – at least as the unholy union of Lou Reed, John Cale, Sterling Morrison and Moe Tucker – since the beginning of December.

"WHEN LOU READ ME THE LYRICS... I WAS FLABBERGASTED"

John Cale

"This is one of those magic, crazy moments where everything was coming together," says Bibbe Hansen, the youngest of the Warhol superstars, of New York's underground art scene. "Everybody and their mother were having something to do with something, and all these things were influencing each other."

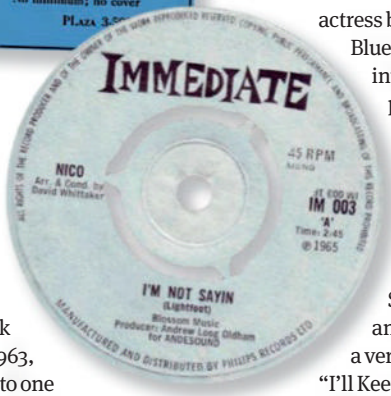
"It's amazing to see how far ahead of the game they were," says Jason Stern, formerly Lou Reed's assistant and now his archivist. "No-one was coming near this stuff. If you watch [Warhol's film] *A Symphony Of Sound* from early '66, it's pretty out-there. There's a part where Nico is going at Cale's bass with a screwdriver."

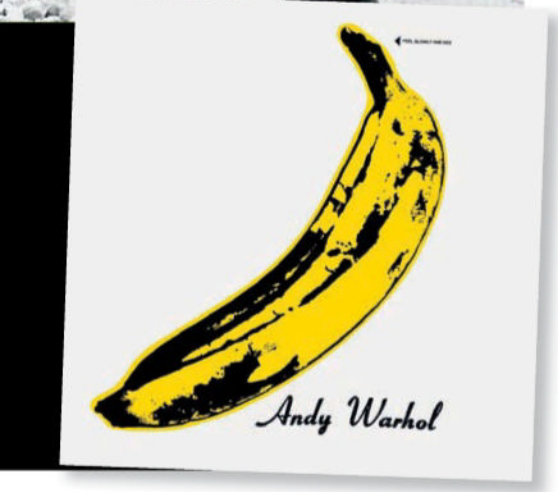
That afternoon at the Factory on January 3, the group try out some of their own songs – from "Venus In Furs" to "Heroin" – and jam on rock'n'roll riffs including The Beatles' "Day Tripper". Reed teaches "There She Goes Again" to Nico, trying to fit the key to her vocal range.

"We spent a year playing the first album," Cale told *Uncut* in 2015, of their determined work ethic. "Every week we'd get together on the weekend and just play and play and play until we got the new arrangements."

Those on the cutting edge don't often get an easy ride, and 1966 will prove to be a frustrating year for The Velvet Underground. There's an unsympathetic music business to deal with, as

"She had a general disdain about her": Nico, August 15, 1965





well as breakneck touring, reluctant engineers, hospital stays, blocked toilets, novelty weddings and visa issues – plus the small matter of their wayward manager and the blossoming fame of their own chanteuse.

While the Velvets are blindingly new, they exist within a metropolis and a country also undergoing seismic social and cultural change. Hard drugs, political activism, pop music and avant-garde art are all shifting into a new, more dangerous gear.

"The population of runaways, drug dealers and revolutionaries in the East Village was growing," says Tom Hurwitz, now an award-winning cinematographer but then a student at Columbia University. "Things that were pregnant in 1966 came to be born in '67 and '68. Those years were tremendously fruitful and fertile – everything was bubbling everywhere."

"The only way I can look at it is that to be prepared for success you first of all have to have a stable personality, which Lou didn't," Cale said of the band's unusual dynamic. "Neither did I, to be fair. So we were never ready for success. Not that we had any. Let's not fool ourselves. What we got was a lot of publicity from Andy, because of which people thought we must be successful on some level, which of course we never were.

"We wanted to break the rules," he told *Uncut* in 2006. "So we broke every fucking rule we could."

WHEN John Cale arrived in New York in the summer of 1963, he was stepping into one of the most vibrant cultural scenes on the planet. Although Downtown took up just a fraction of the island of Manhattan, those few square miles of decaying blocks and brownstones were a hive of forward-thinking musicians, artists, writers and choreographers.

"There was this incredibly lush, fertile experimental art scene," says Hansen, daughter of Fluxus artist Al Hansen and star of Warhol's 1965 film *Prison*. "There were these intermedia things with music and dance and visual art and spoken word, all this crazy shit. At the same time, you have this music scene that had just exploded from the '50s into the '60s, with folk, blues and jazz.

"Being a kid there, on the street, not only did you see people like Merce Cunningham and John Cage and Andy Warhol, you saw Allen Ginsberg and Alan Watts. You saw Bob Dylan, Mary Travers, Peter Yarrow, Phil Ochs, Karen Dalton and Buffy Sainte-Marie. I saw Fred Neil almost every day. Jimi Hendrix was around. Richie Havens was playing his crazy 12-string in the park with no teeth."

Andy Warhol moved to Manhattan in 1949 and by the early '60s had risen to substantial fame with his screenprints, sculptures and paintings of American icons from Campbell's soup to Elvis Presley. He loved music, too, forming a group, The Druds, in 1963. Among their lineup were artists Walter De Maria and Jasper Johns and experimental musician La Monte Young [see panel]. Warhol wrote lyrics and sometimes sang.

"This was very short-lived," says composer Michael Harrison, who was Young's protégé. "They did some performances, but La Monte wasn't happy with Andy's musicianship, let's put it that way. It was a really seminal time in New York. Fluxus was a big part of it and La Monte was a big part of that movement. Before La Monte met Marian Zazeela, he and Yoko Ono were romantic partners. They curated a series of concerts at her loft."

"La Monte was sort of an odd bird," recalls Fluxus member Ken Friedman. "Very strange and standoffish – and very fussy. Back then Fluxus was the underground of the underground. Today everybody thinks of it as being something quite important, but in those days no-one was interested in what we were doing. For a year, around 1963, [Fluxus founder] George Maciunas had a store on Canal Street, the Fluxshop. He sat in it every day for a year and didn't sell a single thing."

In December '63, the month after Warhol set up his Factory studio on East 47th Street, an obscure German model and occasional actress began a residency at Midtown's Blue Angel Lounge. Hear "the intimate songs of Nico", proclaimed the club's flyer, and the singer duly performed standards such as "My Funny Valentine" to little notice, before disappearing back to Europe. By August 1965, she'd released a single, "I'm Not Sayin'", on the Immediate label and was planning the follow-up, a version of Bob Dylan's unreleased "I'll Keep It With Mine", which she claimed the songwriter had given to her during a brief relationship in 1964.

"Nico was beautiful, but she had a general disdain about her, like nothing and nobody was living up to her expectation," says

La Monte Young, July 21, 1972

DRONE CHARGER

The unusual genius of La Monte Young, by 'disciple' Michael Harrison

"LA MONTE is perhaps the most unusual human I've ever met. He's taken his own path since the early '60s. He's very extreme. For decades he lived a 27-hour day, and they later found out that when scientists put people in caves and there was no light, their biorhythms gravitated towards a 27-hour schedule.

"La Monte is perhaps the first western composer to specialise in music of long durations and long tones. He was raised as a Mormon, and even though he's not a Mormon today at all, he carries some of that fervent spirituality. When he's sitting down to practise or perform or even teach, he's seeking a transformational experience. I would say he's a spiritual leader. I frequently make analogy to Pythagoras: there were musical instruments with Pythagorean tuning and the Pythagorean comma, and he and his followers understood all that way back then. La Monte really has seminal ideas that I think will play out over millennia."

HARRY FOX/MIRRORPIX VIA GETTY IMAGES; CHRISTIAN ROSE/ROGER VIOLLET VIA GETTY IMAGES

Shock treatment: the VU at the New York Society for Clinical Psychiatry annual dinner, The Delmonico Hotel, New York City, January 13, 1966

ADAM RITCHIE/REDFERNS

Hansen. "Now that I'm older I recognise that comes from grand insecurities and self-loathing, not arrogance. But when we're younger, we just go, 'Oh, she thinks she's all that.'"

Despite the failure of The Druds, Warhol was still keen to explore a musical project. After he met Hansen on the day she was released from juvenile detention [see panel], Warhol set her up fronting a group, Bibbe & The Boys.

"I had a boyfriend named Bob who was one of the more high-profile pot dealers downtown," she says. "He had a couple of friends and we formed a band. So it was Robert, Bobby, Bob and Bibby – we probably should have been Bibbe & The Bobs. We would go to Chuck Wein's apartment near the Pan Am Building to work on songs. All I remember is us getting incredibly fucking high every time we went, just completely obliterated. Never mind singing, memorising lyrics, doing harmonies – we could barely speak. We were beyond verbal, we were struggling to emit human sounds of any kind. This was a massive fail from beginning to end. I have often thought, although only to myself, that the world might owe me a tiny bit of thanks for The Velvet Underground, because had Bibbe & The Boys not failed so marvellously and completely, we might never have had The Velvet Underground."

Shortly after his arrival in Manhattan, Cale began playing with La Monte Young's Theatre Of Eternal Music, exploring the radical possibilities of extended and amplified drones. "Nobody'd heard anything like it," said Cale. "No-one else in the world was doing anything like it."

Late in 1964, he was recruited alongside Walter De Maria and fellow Eternal Music player Tony Conrad to play live as The Primitives, in support of a wild novelty garage single, "The Ostrich". Its composer, a staff writer at the small label Pickwick Records, was Lou Reed. The song itself, sounding something like The Kingsmen via the Marquis de Sade, deployed an 'Ostrich guitar', a strange echo of LaMonte Young's more sophisticated tuning techniques.

"What really impressed me was that it had been written by tuning all six strings of the guitar to one note," said Cale. "I thought, 'What the hell's going on here?' We hit it off straight away."

"WARHOL WAS A BIG PART OF THEIR LEARNING EXPERIENCE"

Don Fleming

Cale and Reed soon moved into 56 Ludlow Street and started playing together as a duo in 1965. With a Wollensak tape recorder borrowed from Conrad, they laid down demos of Reed's songs that summer, including "Venus In Furs", "Heroin", "All Tomorrow's Parties" and "I'm Waiting For The Man". The music was folky, at times pastoral, at others swinging, and heavily influenced by Dylan. But the lyrics were something new: raw, unflinching and steeped in the drugs, sex and violence of Downtown.

"Lou brought 'Venus In Furs' and 'I'm Waiting For The Man' into Pickwick when he was a jobbing songwriter," said Cale. "'Venus...' was a poetry song, which he used to play on acoustic guitar. The first time we played it at our Ludlow Street apartment in fall '65, we just locked ourselves in and did the damn thing as a 15-minute jam. I was hellbent on doing something that had never been done before and so was Lou. We wanted to be the best band in the world."

The pair busked as The Falling Spikes on the corner of 125th and Broadway, and dabbled with heroin, both contracting hepatitis for their troubles. Angus MacLise provided rippling percussion and turned Reed on to speed, but was replaced by the more primeval, metronomic Moe Tucker for their first gig as The Velvet Underground – now completed by guitarist Sterling Morrison, with Al Aronowitz managing – at a high school in Summit, New Jersey, on December 11. The Myddle Class were headlining and Carole King, co-writer of their single "Free As The Wind", was in attendance (complete with a couple of children she was babysitting), along with underground filmmaker Barbara Rubin. Performing just "Venus In Furs", "Heroin" and "I'm Waiting For The Man", the Velvets were now loud and ferocious, the savagery underpinned by Cale's droning viola.

"Is the viola suited to experimental music?" said Cale. "No, it's just the use of the drones; it gives you a sense of space. But if you want to play three-string drones on the viola, you gotta modify the bridge. You can't do very much with it after that. But it's a great noise."

"When [Cale] and Lou Reed formed The Velvet Underground it was to be a rock band that experimented in sound and noise with dissonance and microtones," wrote Jonathan

(From left) Paul Morrissey, Nico, Andy Warhol and Gerard Malanga at the Night Beat Freakout Happening at the Action House, Island Park, New York, December 4, 1966. The lineup included the Velvets, The Mothers Of Invention, The Fugs and The Ronettes

Richman in *Uncut* in 2021. "Microtones are what happen when the centre of the note is no longer necessarily the place you're aiming for – this is important: if one player in a band thinks in these ways, the sound of the whole band changes."

By this time, Nico, whose debut single had flopped, was back in New York and meeting up with Warhol and his business manager, Paul Morrissey, at a Mexican restaurant. "The minute we left the restaurant Paul said we should use Nico in the movies and find a rock group to play for her," recalled Warhol in his memoir, *Popism*. "He was raving that she was the most beautiful creature that ever lived. Nico was a new type of female superstar... When people described her, they used words like memento mori and macabre... She was mysterious and European, a real moon goddess type."

When Morrissey, on the invitation of Barbara Rubin, saw The Velvet Underground at a residency at Café Bizarre in late December – with Tucker on tambourine, so as not to disturb the patrons' drinking – he dragged Warhol and, as she remembered it, Nico, down to see them. The party were impressed. Aronowitz's son, Myles, says his father introduced Nico to Reed, just as he had done with Bob Dylan and The Beatles 16 months earlier. Morrissey asked The Velvet Underground if they had a manager; they said no.

BEING welcomed into the Factory scene by their new manager, Andy Warhol, certainly caused an immediate change in the band's fortunes. "We were still starving, but perhaps not quite so hungry," Cale recalled.

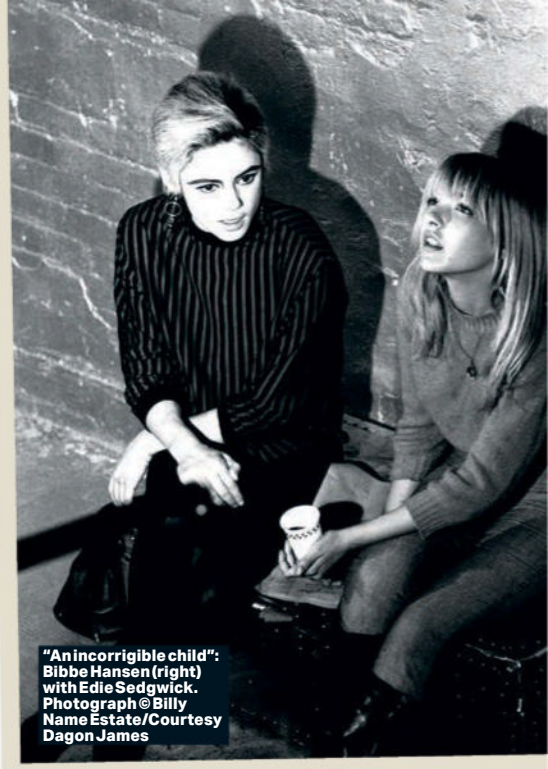
Where previously Cale and Reed subsisted on oatmeal and donated blood for cash, they now had Morrissey buying them Vox amps. Warhol made films about them – rehearsing, pretending to torture Tucker, having tarot cards read – and enlisted them for his customary screen tests. Their access to drugs, too, became more reliable, with Robert Olivo, aka Ondine, providing Reed, especially, with a ready supply of speed. The singer was now in a position to decorate his beaten-up apartment with a priceless roll of Warhol's cow wallpaper and leave it there when he moved out shortly afterwards.

"They *got* us at the Factory," Cale said. "All of a sudden we weren't just four people fighting everybody else. It was an endlessly entertaining scene to be around. Something was always happening."

"They were part of Andy's world during '66, for sure," says the Reed archivist Don Fleming. "That was a big part of their learning experience: the way Andy would get everyone to do work, and he got everyone to do *his* work as well. That was just his magic."

The group's first gig under Warhol's management was at the Delmonico Hotel, for a convention of New York psychiatrists. Playing in front of Warhol's experimental films, the band were joined by Factory superstars Gerard Malanga and Mary Woronov. It proved to be a fitting revenge for Reed's teenage electroshock therapy. "The doctors are bombarded by the decibels of three fire engines and blinded by stun-gun lights," wrote Ultra Violet in her memoir, *Famous For 15 Minutes: My Years With Andy Warhol*. "One Fifth Avenue practitioner regurgitates his roast beef and several analysts are heard making appointments with each other for the next day."

Next came a series of shows at Jonas Mekas' Film-Makers' Cinematheque, dubbed Andy ➤



"An incorrigible child": Bibbe Hansen (right) with Edie Sedgwick. Photograph © Billy Name Estate/Courtesy Dagon James

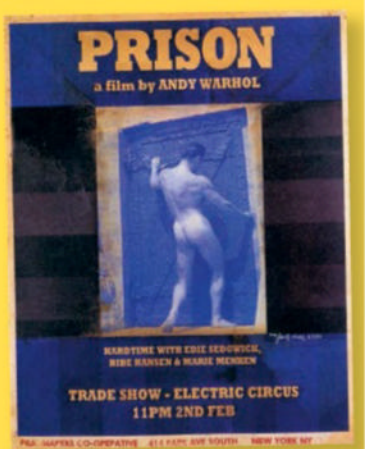
STREET HASSLE

Bibbe Hansen on meeting Warhol the day she got out of jail

"THE first time I went away it was a confluence of things. I was wanted as a person of interest in a murder that occurred on the Upper West Side. I was not in school and they couldn't find my mother, who was living on the street, and when they found my father, he hadn't seen me. Then I happen to be in one of the biggest narcotics busts in the history of the US. I talked my way out of it, saying I was just visiting the wife of the drug dealer. But the minute they entered my name in the report at the station, my name came up in 14 different ways, as a person they were very interested in talking to, as a missing person. I was classed as 'an incorrigible child' and given a designation of PINS, which is Person In Need of Supervision.

"After a few months of incarceration at a youth facility in the South Bronx I was released. My dad and I went to this coffee shop – my dad was famously one of the most impoverished artists that anybody knew, so Roy Lichtenstein bought us burgers. Then I feel these eyes peering at me: Andy's studying me intensely from across the table: 'And what do you do?' My father piped up, 'I just sprung her from jail.' Andy, his eyes go big: 'Oh, please tell us about that!' So I told him several war stories and he and Chuck [Wein] said it together: 'We have to make a movie of that.' So we went to the Factory and that was *Prison*."

TIM BOXER/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES. BILLY NAME ESTATE/COURTESY DAGON JAMES



The Exploding Plastic Inevitable at the Dom in New York's East Village, 1966. Photograph © Billy Name Estate/Courtesy Dagon James

Warhol's Up-Tight. Mekas had fled Lithuania, via a spell in a Nazi labour camp, arriving in the US in 1949, when he began his pioneering work in experimental film. He was just one likely influence on Warhol's own films.

"Warhol was obviously a magpie for ideas," says Friedman. "So Jackson Mac Low made these odd experimental films where he would just make a film of a tree for 24 hours. Then Warhol took that idea for some of his own films, like *Sleep*."

At the Cinematheque, between February 8 and 13, the group and Nico performed behind projections of Warhol's *Empire*, *Vinyl* and *Eat*, statuesque amid the cavorting Factory stars who joined them on stage.

"I ran into Gerard Malanga, and he said, 'We're doing this performance thing at the Cinematheque tonight, you've got to come and dance,'" says Hansen. "So I did, and it was a lot of fun. The Velvets were way back on the stage, almost backstage, in the dark as the films were showing. I remember Lou not really performing outwards – it was almost like they were having a rehearsal, playing for themselves. I remember 'Venus In Furs' very well, but I remember hearing earlier versions of it, too. A lot of this is through a drug haze..."

After a residency at a Queens discotheque fell through (the club, Murray The K's World, closed on its opening night and then promptly burnt down), Warhol and Morrissey set The Velvet Underground and Nico up at the Polski Dom Narodowy on St Mark's Place. There, in its newly whitewashed hall, they became the centrepiece of Warhol's new audio-visual extravaganza, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, with music, films, dancers, projections, strobes and interludes from a DJ, Norman Dolph of Columbia Records.

"I felt Warhol's films were technically tremendously crude," says Tom Hurwitz, who was at one of the early Dom shows. "But this was not technically crude. The amplification was very well done and this was a time when bands would appear with a few speakers and amplifiers – and that was it. I remember 'Heroin'. I wouldn't call it psychedelic: it was downers, heroin and various barbiturates. The main feeling was this kind of anarchistic fog. And Nico: oh God, she was beautiful; she was tall and so statuesque, long white-blonde hair, and she droned with everybody else."

Playing long sets there for a month gave the group the opportunity to perfect their punishing new sound, but it also generated a great deal of publicity. Whereas the East Village had been "babushkaville", as Warhol put it in *Popism*, now "all that month the limousines pulled up outside the Dom... Things couldn't look this strange and new without some barrier being broken."

"I WOULDN'T CALL IT PSYCHEDELIC. IT WAS HEROIN AND DOWNERS"

Tom Hurwitz

Adored by both freaks and moneyed sophisticates, Warhol was the perfect figure to accomplish this social change. Inside the Dom, the strobes pulsed over Downtown doyens and society figures alike: Walter Cronkite, Jackie Kennedy, Salvador Dalí, Robert Rauschenberg, Allen Ginsberg and Rudolf Nureyev.

"Would anybody like Jackie Kennedy have been interested in the least in this music without Warhol?" says Hurwitz. "That these people would now make their way downtown and go to the Dom was totally new. It was part of this breakup of the hidebound cultural crystal of New York and its change into something that was completely different. It was like fission, releasing a tremendous amount of energy, and the younger generation of the rich in New York were very interested in this new birth of artistic, sexual and musical freedom. The mores of society were changing: I remember going into Kaufman's, a military surplus store, and Jean Shrimpton, one of the most beautiful models in the universe, was starkers, trying on jeans in one of the aisles because all the changing rooms were filled up. Nobody batted an eyelash."

The Velvet Underground had fully moved away from their folky days: their songs now routinely lasted 15 minutes or more, with Tucker even playing rubbish bins for a few nights at the Dom after her drums were stolen. They wore sunglasses and black clothes, a move Cale described as "kind of Welsh Methodist empirical [with] a little bit of a Beat influence", while Nico often dressed in white. This move away from folk to electrified sounds was happening across Manhattan, if not often taken to such extremes.

"We were the house band at the Cafe Au Go Go then," says Lowell 'Banana' Levinger of The Youngbloods. "The scene in the Village was changing from being mostly jazz and folk to being more folk-rock and more rock and blues. There was quite a scene around them, but the Velvets were just another band. We barely noticed Dylan going electric – we had already been electric for years!"

TOWARDS the end of their run at the Dom, it became ever more important to document this new sound. Warhol turned to Norman Dolph for help in producing a demo to present to labels. In return for a silkscreened artwork, Dolph arranged three nights at Scepter Studios. There, in 10 hours, the group layed down the majority of their debut album.

"We'd been rehearsing those songs for a year and a half," said Cale. "We knew exactly what we

Morrison and Cale rocking the "Welsh Methodist empirical" style at the Silver Factory, 1966. Photograph © Billy Name Estate/Courtesy Dagon James

wanted those songs to sound like, which was how we sounded live, and just as loud. The only problems we had were with the engineers, who kept telling us that everything was going into the red and distorting. We said, 'That's how it's supposed to sound.'"

Scepter was a rundown studio on West 54th Street, used mainly for demos by established acts. Small and spartan, it was reflective of a Manhattan rife with crime and neglect.

"New York was a tough grind," says Levinger. "I'd be walking home from Cafe Au Go Go to my place at two in the morning, I'd be on 7th Street and all of a sudden there would be a huge crash on the street right next to me. It would be the Puerto Rican kids up on the roof throwing milk bottles at me. I got robbed a bunch of times."

In the studio, Nico sang her allotted three songs – "All Tomorrow's Parties", "Femme Fatale" and "I'll Be Your Mirror" – and Reed looked after the rest, despite Morrissey's protestations from the control room. Not even "There She Goes Again", which she'd tried out at their first rehearsal, became a Nico song.

"That was the easiest song of all, which came from Lou's days writing pop at Pickwick," said Cale. "I don't know who the song was about; any number of derelict girls we knew down on the Lower East Side, probably. She would have been a bad girl."

At their January 3 rehearsal, "European Son" had been performed with lyrics taken from "Suzie Q", but at Scepter, Reed sang his own lyrics, giving way to a frenzied improvisation when Cale scrapes a chair across some aluminium studio plates and drops a glass bottle. This destructive sound art may have been new in rock'n'roll, but it echoed Fluxus works from the early '60s.

"We didn't know what we were doing but it sounded funny," said Cale. "It sounded like a plate glass window being smashed."

"The whole time it was being made," wrote Warhol, "nobody seemed happy with it, especially Nico. 'I want to sound like Bawwwhhhh Deee-lahh,' she wailed, so upset because she didn't... I was worried that it would all come out sounding too professional. But with the Velvets, I should have known I didn't have to worry – one of the things that was so great about them was they always sounded raw and crude."

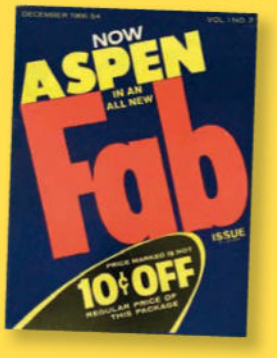
Dolph's Columbia colleagues quickly declined after hearing the acetate. Atlantic suggested they might be game if "Heroin" and "Venus In Furs" were ditched. Someone at Elektra recommended the removal of Cale's viola. Tom Wilson,

A DIFFERENT VU

Shiny boots, demos and curios – the Velvets' sonic underground

LOOP
RECORDED 1964

This experimental piece – seven minutes of lo-fi, blown-out scree that seems to invent drone metal – was recorded by John Cale before the Velvets but released with a Warhol-edited issue of *Aspen* magazine in December 1966.



THE OSTRICH
RECORDED 1964

"OK, I want everybody to settle down, we got something new we're gonna show you..." So begins Lou Reed's greatest song for the low-rent Pickwick Records. With its troglodyte riff, droning guitars and screaming, it's pretty much the first Velvets track.

I'M WAITING FOR THE MAN (DEMO)
RECORDED 1965

This May '65 demo cut by Reed and Cale is swinging country-folk, somewhere between Dylan and ancient Delta blues. The vibe is reminiscent of Downtown rebels The Fugs, and Cale's harmonies are eerie and European, but the lyrics are pure Reed reportage.

LITTLE SISTER (LIVE)
RECORDED 1966

Released properly on Nico's 1967 LP *Chelsea Girl*, a bootleg of the Velvets performing this Reed/Cale co-write surfaced a few years ago. Most likely taped at their Morgantown, West Virginia gig on November 5, 1966, it's lively, heavy and would have easily fitted on the band's debut.

MELODY LAUGHTER (LIVE)
RECORDED 1966

The Valleydale Ballroom tape from November 4, 1966 is so good it was given an official release on a deluxe boxset. The set begins with this enthralling half-hour of loose improvisation, feedback giving way to a hypnotic pulse and some great Nico vocalising.

WRAP YOUR TROUBLES IN DREAMS
RECORDED 1967

Also included on Nico's *Chelsea Girl*, this Reed song was a very early inclusion in the Velvets' repertoire, back when they were The Falling Spikes. At one point it featured the Indian instrument the sarinda, once played by short-lived member Elektrah Lobel while her knuckles bled.

producer of Bob Dylan, Sun Ra, the Mothers Of Invention and Simon & Garfunkel, and recently installed at MGM/Verve, was interested, though, partly due to the possibility of a Warhol album cover and partly because of Nico. The pair had likely met at a Dylan session in May 1965; it would be surprising if either the striking Germanic blonde or the black folk-rock producer, both rare birds, had forgotten each other. They arranged to sign to Verve in early May, when the group planned to be in Los Angeles for their first West Coast dates.

LANDING in Los Angeles on May 1, The Velvet Underground and Nico found themselves disconnected. A carefree environment where pot and acid were the drugs of choice, this was not uptight New York, still in thrall to speed, heroin and confrontation.

"California could float along on good vibes, good weather and good drugs," says Hurwitz, "but New York couldn't."

They signed to Verve the next day. The following evening, Nico drove the band from their rented home, The Castle – soon to be immortalised by Love on *Da Capo* – to Sunset Strip, scraping the car as they exited the gates of their mansion. This was the first night of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable's residency at The Trip and everyone turned up for the circus: Neil Young, Jane Fonda, Steve McQueen, Sonny & Cher, John Phillips and more.

Although booked until the 18th, on their third night The Trip was closed down for good; in any case, the Warhol posse's onstage acts of sadomasochism and theatrical shooting-up, coupled with the group's distorted, droning grind, had not proved popular.

"The San Francisco scene was bands and audiences grooving together," wrote Warhol, "sharing the experience, whereas the Velvets' style was to alienate people – they would actually play with their backs to the audience!"

With the group at a loose end, Tom Wilson had them record new versions of "Heroin", "Venus In Furs" and "I'm Waiting For The Man" (some accounts suggest "There She Goes Again" was redone too). The new takes, tracked at TTG in Hollywood, were tauter and crisper.

"It captures Lou's voice perfectly and it's got a body," explained Cale of "I'm Waiting For The Man", "which Tom Wilson achieved when we re-recorded it. I liked it because it was rock'n'roll. I hammered the piano, smacking it with fists."

They were invited to play the Fillmore in San Francisco by promoter Bill Graham, but they hated Jefferson Airplane and the flower power vibes. By all accounts, the feeling was mutual, though not all New York groups got such a cold shoulder.

"Out in California they absolutely loved our music, which was a mix of folk and Latin and jazz and rock," says Levinger. "We experienced all this acceptance and love and joy, so after the third time we returned home from California, we said, 'Wait a minute, why do we keep going back to New York?'"

Topping off a difficult trip, Reed shot up something that caused all his joints to seize up. Rushed back to New York, he was admitted to Beth Israel Hospital for weeks with a flare-up of hepatitis. While there, his college mentor Delmore Schwartz was found dead in a room at the Chelsea Hotel.

"NICO HELD HER OWN. SHE HAD TALENT AND PRESENCE"

Jason Stern

"It's weirdly symbolic," says Jason Stern. "Delmore is Lou's first big mentor, who really shaped the direction of Lou's writing. When Delmore dies, this is just months after Lou starts spending a ton of time with Andy Warhol, his next huge mentor."

The Mothers Of Invention's *Freak Out!*, produced by Wilson, was released on Verve in June, immediately making them underground favourites. Meanwhile, Barbara Rubin's plans to get The Velvet Underground to play the Royal Albert Hall that month came to naught. With Reed still incapacitated, what was left of the group played a run of shows at Poor Richard's, a club in a Chicago church. Cale handled all the lead vocals and more keyboards, while Tucker switched to bass and percussionist Angus MacLise returned, albeit on – as Reed was keen to emphasise – a temporary basis. Nico, meanwhile, was visiting friends in Ibiza.

"Our problem with Nico was: what did she do when she'd finished?" said Cale. "She couldn't just stand there, but she didn't like being side-stage, either. I suppose that was one of those insoluble problems that made the Velvets different."

"What the hell is this?": Reed in 2013

"It's not like they got stuck with Nico," says Stern. "I think there was recognition that she held her own. I mean, she was obviously quite talented – her records post-Velvet Underground are so good and she had the presence. I can't imagine some of those songs not sung by her."

In July, their debut single, "All Tomorrow's Parties", backed with "I'll Be Your Mirror" – both Nico-sung tracks – was released to little fanfare. Reed had recovered and the Exploding Plastic Inevitable troupe embarked on a late-summer tour, including a residency at the Chrysler Museum in Provincetown, Massachusetts. It was a wild trip, with the ensemble, now including actor Eric Emerson, stealing whips and chains for their act from a local store, until police confiscated them during a performance. They also headed to the beach, still dressed head to toe in black, and performed some ad hoc plumbing.

"It seemed like no matter where the Velvets went, the toilets would stop up," recalled Warhol of that trip. "So they started scooping handfuls of shit from the toilets and slinging it out the windows."

When not on the road, Reed and the group – sans Nico – worked on new songs. There was a rock'n'roll number about the rush of mainlining speed, "White Light/White Heat", and a two-chord epic, "Sister Ray", a depraved story-song that Reed was especially proud of. It was first played as an instrumental at Poor Richard's, with Reed still in hospital. "It was carnage," said Cale.

"The amplified violin goes higher and higher, becomes a shriek, a feedback noise, a regular dit-dah-dit of unbearable Morse code screaming above the other noise," wrote Larry McCombs, reviewing a Chicago performance at the Boston Broadside. "It all builds to a tremendous climax. You wish it would stop... The drummer hits a shuddering beat that you feel through the floor. It's all coming to an end. But it doesn't. It goes on."

There's no place for Nico in these new songs, but the Warhol film she starred in, *Chelsea*

AFTER HOURS

Reed archivist Jason Stern on Lou's fond memories of the Velvets

"I DON'T think Lou had any resentment about anything that happened in 1966. Towards the end [of Lou's life] I remember he got [2013's] *White Light/White Heat* Super Deluxe Edition in the mail. He's like, 'What the hell is this?' He's pissed they did this without him. He puts it on and he just flips from being angry to feeling this nostalgia for the moment captured on tape. He goes over to his computer and starts writing an email to John Cale, just complimenting his playing. They weren't in regular touch, but this wasn't the first time he had just written to him out of the blue, and it was very warm – the tone was to the effect of 'hope you're doing well'.

"Lou didn't really like to talk about the past that much, but he always spoke of John and Nico, and especially Sterling and Moe, very fondly. Andy as well – I speculate that maybe Andy had more negative feelings about Lou than Lou had about Andy."

CHRISTIAN ALMINANA/GETTY IMAGES

"A protective environment for kooks": Nico and the Velvets at the Silver Factory with Mary Woronov, Gerard Malanga, Andy Warhol and Nico's son Ari, 1966. Photograph © Billy Name Estate/Courtesy Dagon James

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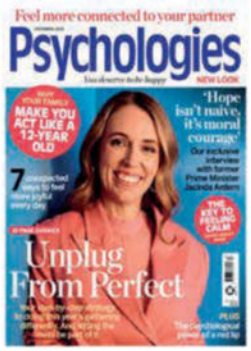

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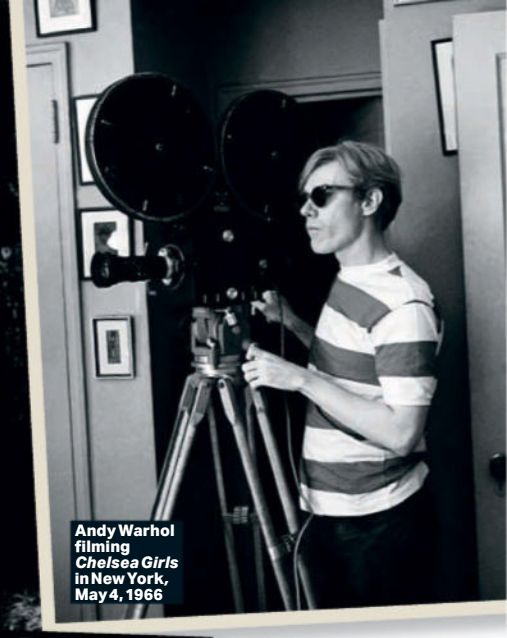
Bad vibes and nihilism: Moe Tucker, Nico and John Cale in 1966. Photograph © Billy Name Estate/Courtesy Dagon James



Andy Warhol filming *Chelsea Girls* in New York, May 4, 1966

Girls, opened in September. Although three and a half hours long, it was more accessible than, say, *Empire* – eight hours of the Empire State Building at sunset and during the night – and its surprise success propelled the singer further into the public's consciousness.

"[Warhol] was making *Chelsea Girls* when we rehearsed, and that was harrowing," says Cale. "You'd see the girls disintegrating and sliding down walls with tears in their eyes. Nobody normal would go near the Factory. It was a protective environment for kooks – quite dangerous for your sanity."

Since California, things no longer seemed to be going the Velvets' way. Reed had been asked to write a theme song for *Chelsea Girls*, but his hepatitis put paid to that. Then Cale's own hepatitis ruled him out of some autumn dates at New York's Balloon Farm, where he was replaced by Fluxus artist Henry Flynt, whose country-tinged violin playing irritated Reed. Michelangelo Antonioni wanted them for the club scene in his film *Blow-Up*, but visa issues meant The Yardbirds took their place in October. There was no sign of a release date for their album, either, as Wilson demanded Reed come up with a new song, one sung by Nico and suitable for release as a single.

In the end, at Broadway's Mayfair Recording, Reed insisted on singing "Sunday Morning" himself. He used his sweetest voice for this gentle tale of drug-induced neurosis, inspired by Warhol's suggestion he write a song about paranoia. Cale marshalled celeste and viola, this time played delicately, while Nico had to settle for backing vocals in the final chorus.

"The song captures a mood and a specific event," remembered Cale. "Lou and I had been up all night on crank, as usual, so we decided to visit one of his old Syracuse college pals. Unfortunately, this guy's upper-middle-class wife didn't appreciate visits from old college pals high on amphetamines, at 3am, who wanted to play music. He had a guitar, which Lou picked up, and the evening inspired him to write the song."

As someone decorated a paper dress with condiments and someone else smashed up a Chrysler DeSoto, Andy Warhol gave away the lucky lady: go-go dancer Randy Rossi. Nico sang "Here Comes The Bride" before The Velvet Underground played. This was the climax to the so-called Mod Wedding on November 20 – a real ceremony for one competition-winning couple, part of Dick Clark's Caravan Of Stars event in Detroit.

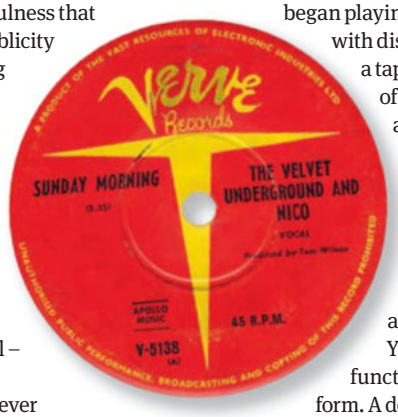
"Electronic devices screamed, guitars and drums throbbed and a fiddle added to the din as purple and orange lights splashed dots and squares across the stage," wrote Linda LaMarre in *The Detroit News*. "'It's not the kind of wedding we had planned for our daughter,' Mrs Rossi said, as eerie screeches emitted from the stage."

That Warhol's involvement in the event was a rare misstep was clear even then: the wedding was part of the kitsch Carnaby Street Fun Festival, sponsored by the Food Fair supermarket chain. The only thing absent in this mess was the arch tastefulness that elevated the artist's usual publicity stunts. Still, at the continuing Exploding Plastic Inevitable dates, Warhol remained the draw: in an ad for their December 10 gig at Philadelphia's Young Man's Hebrew Association, the band are listed in small, faint type far below the artist and his films. Perhaps their association with Warhol – and indeed, with Nico – had reaped all the rewards it was ever going to. "Andy was losing interest in us," said Cale. "He was getting into films. That was the new thing for him."

The Warhol association may have gained The Velvet Underground column inches, but actual fans were few in number. The lack of available material was one issue, but the band's bad vibes and nihilism were sorely out of step with the majority of American youth. Their apoliticism was a particular turn-off: after the bloody Battle Of Ia Drang in November 1965, Vietnam had become hard to ignore.

"By 1966, the political situation demanded more and more attention, and it made one unable to take an agnostic position," says Hurwitz. "The idea of individual artistic expression, of breaking the bounds of hidebound artistic forms, didn't seem something I was particularly interested in any more. My heart was more in San Francisco – I loved the Airplane, the Dead and the Mothers Of Invention, and from New York, The Blues Project. I thought the Velvets' poetry was pretty good, but it didn't lift my heart in the way the other stuff did."

At least, in December, "Sunday Morning" became the first Reed-fronted Velvets track to be released, backed by Nico's "Femme Fatale". Never the most stable collaboration, the group sometimes performed without her, while Nico began playing small solo dates – first with disastrous backing from a tape, after Reed forebade any of the group to play for her, and then with a rotating cast of guitarists, notably Jackson Browne. "I'll Keep It With Mine", the song she cherished and that the Velvets always attempted to avoid playing, was a regular in her setlists.



Yet Nico and the group still functioned as a unit in some form. A demo, still unreleased, marked "Ondine – December" and dating from 1966 or possibly '67 – captured Reed, Cale and Nico experimenting with a new song.

"It's just the three of them in an apartment," says Don Fleming, who's been curating more of Reed's demos for eventual release. "There are a whole group of songs Lou has written on the piano, that he's showing to John. And Nico is ➤➤

SANTI VISALLI/GETTY IMAGES

"Everybody knew the excitement wouldn't last...": the Velvets in the grounds of architect Philip Johnson's Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut, 1967. Photograph © Billy Name Estate/ Courtesy Dagon James

on the tape: partway through someone cracks a joke, and you just hear Nico say, 'Naughty!'"

DRESSED up in Warhol's banana artwork, *The Velvet Underground & Nico* was finally released in early 1967, nine months after most of it was recorded. That it was soon recalled and re-pressed after a lawsuit from Eric Emerson, whose image is projected in an onstage photo, was a setback, but still: their debut album was available to the public. It was not a hit, but for those who'd been waiting, it was a revelation.

"I got placed in a permanent institution for a couple of years," says Bibbe Hansen. "They pretty much locked me up and threw the key away. My father visited and brought me a copy of the new Velvet Underground with the peelable banana label and I absolutely fell in love. It was all the songs I remembered and absolutely adored. I was just thrilled to have it."

But, lamented Cale: "Everybody knew the excitement of the first album wouldn't last."

The band and Nico continued to tour for a few months, while Cale, Reed, Morrison and Tom Wilson made Nico's debut album, *Chelsea Girl*, in April and May. As well as "I'll Keep It With Mine", the record included "Little Sister" and "Wrap Your Troubles In Dreams", Reed and Cale tracks originally written for The Velvet Underground and played live. "It Was A Pleasure Then", the only co-write between Reed, Cale and Nico, introduces the haunting sound she pursued on subsequent solo albums. In June 1967, however, everything changed.

"Lou fired Andy Warhol and didn't tell anybody until about a week later," said Cale. "Lou was getting more satisfaction from writing pretty songs and he wanted to go in that direction, and he had an ally in Steve Sesnick, who was the [new] manager, who went to Moe and Sterling and said, 'Look, this is Lou's band. You are the backing band. That's the way it's going to be.'"

If Warhol was gone, so was Nico, the primary reason for most of the band's coverage in the preceding year. Now without the protection, funding or restrictions of Warhol and the Factory community, The Velvet Underground were set adrift in the conventional music business. For better or worse, they were becoming a normal rock group. Not that their final record with Cale, 1968's *White Light/White Heat*, sounded conventional; if anything, its punishing distortion was more radical than their debut and more reflective of their ear-splitting live shows.

"EVEN BY OUR STANDARDS, WE WERE PRETTY UNSTABLE"

John Cale

"*White Light/White Heat* was recorded quickly," remembered Cale. "It had to be. We were barely able to be in the same room for more than five minutes... Even by our standards we were pretty unstable, and there were a lot of drugs. So it was very different to the first album, which we'd really prepared ourselves."

After *White Light...*, The Velvet Underground exploded into a whole constellation of incredible music. There were more albums without Cale, then decades of solo work from Reed, Nico and Cale, all of which provided life-changing inspiration for artists from David Bowie to Patti Smith, Joy Division to Cowboy Junkies, Can to Jonathan Richman, Galaxie 500 to Charli XCX.

New York was changing, too: Fluxus dissolved, Andy Warhol was shot and La Monte Young started living 27-hour days inside his Dream House audio-visual installation space. The city's infrastructure disintegrated further, as progressive student politics unravelled into what the FBI described as domestic terrorism.

"The Weathermen were all my friends," says Hurwitz. "Most of them came out of Columbia University. They thought that somehow they could will [change] to happen, if they just make enough noise and do some violence – I mean, it's the typical stupid anarchist idea of propaganda of the deed."

SIXTY years on, the story of The Velvet Underground has the air of myth, their early years practically a series of lucky coincidences and chance meetings: would *any* of it have taken place if one of the major players had been absent? Or even without a more marginal figure, such as Al Aronowitz, Paul Morrissey or Barbara Rubin?

"I think without the Warhol/Nico connection, none of it would have happened," says Fleming. "The Velvets would have just been on some other completely different path."

"Everyone brought their own unique contribution to the table," agrees Stern. "You can't have The Velvet Underground without any of them. When it comes to 1966, I attribute so much to just the sheer repetitions of playing these improvisational Exploding Plastic Inevitable shows over and over throughout the year. I think that's how you get to later songs like 'Sister Ray' – you need that level of insanity to get there."

"We only did things our way," said Cale. "We were arrogant, perhaps, in thinking we knew best. We were also right. We did know best."

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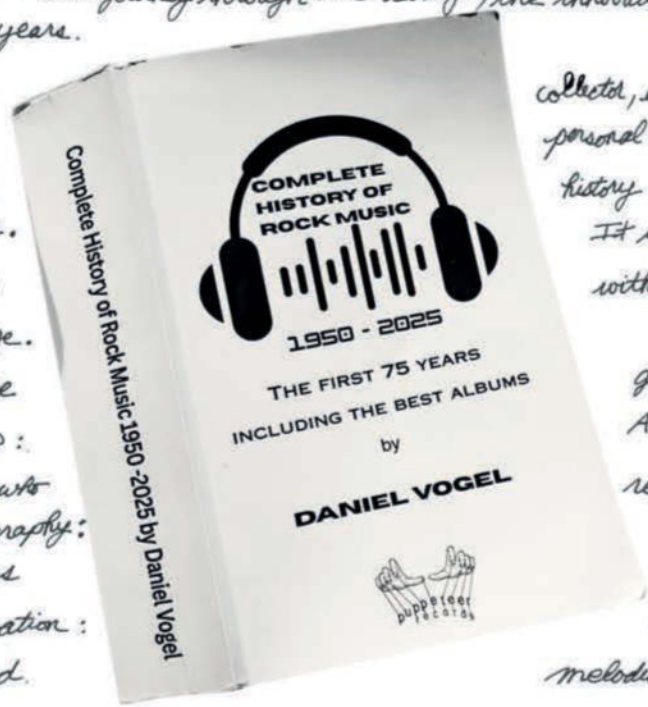

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TO see Mavis Staples is to be in the presence of an icon. After all, it's hard to imagine an artist who exceeds her longevity at the intersection of American pop music and social history. The few who might match it need only one name: Bob, Willie, Joni, Neil.

But the feeling she evokes isn't awe. It's warmth, love, family. Makes sense, since she was raised in a family band. Hers was the deep, sonorous voice of The Staple Singers, formed as a gospel group by her father, Pops Staples, in Chicago in the 1950s. Alongside her siblings, Mavis grew up playing in churches, moved to the folk circuit, became intimately entwined with the civil rights movement and took Dr King's message to the mainstream via soul, funk and pop. More recently, as she outlived Pops, her brother and her sisters, Mavis has redefined kinship to embrace a circle of collaborators that includes Jeff Tweedy, tonight's opener Nathaniel Rateliff and countless more.

She's a matriarch who's seen hardship but kept on marching, and on this night, her big old hug couldn't be more right on time. Although it's never mentioned, each of the 3,000-plus souls in attendance must feel it. Just two days have passed since masked federal immigration agents shot to death Renee Nicole Good, a 37-year-old Minneapolis mother whose last words were, "I'm not mad at you." We're wounded, raw and hurting.

Staples is preceded to the stage by her band – guitar, bass and drums, plus two backing vocalists – who lock into a slinky groove. When her name is called, she's guided to centre stage by a careful escort on one arm; after all, she's 86. But the years almost visibly fall away, her tentative steps replaced by a pulse-quickening double-time clap.

> The feeling she evokes isn't awe. It's warmth, love, family

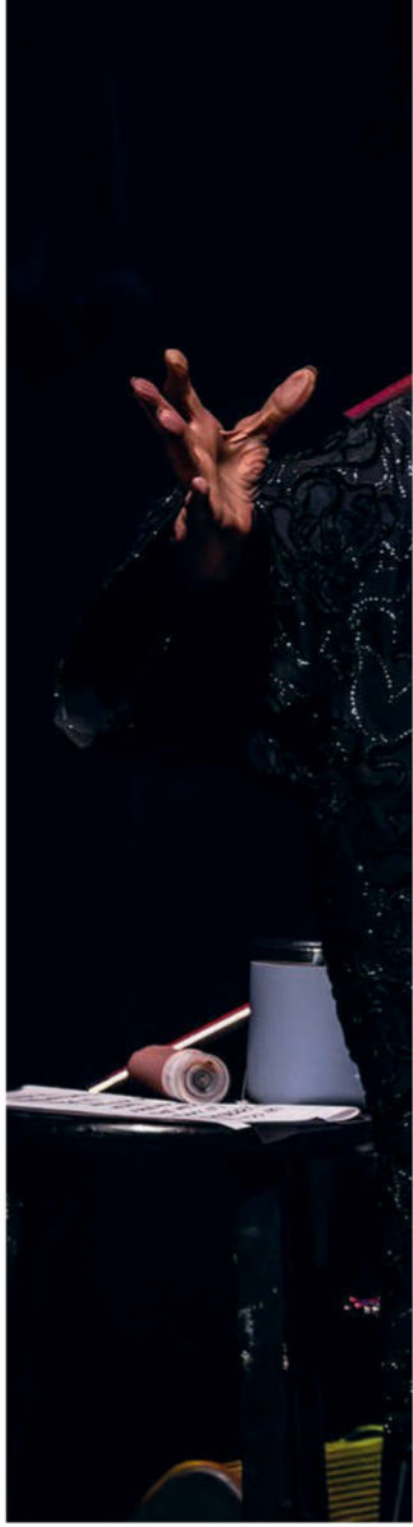
The groove turns insistent. "*There's too many people telling too many lies*", she begins. "*There's too many children with tears in their eyes*". The Staple Singers released this song, "City In The Sky", on their 1974 album of the same name, but it might as well be 1954, or today. Mavis ends it with a snippet of the century-old hymn "I'll Fly Away", repeating the title like an incantation.

Yet there's no dwelling on escapism. It's time to make a stand: "*I'm just another soldier in the army of love*", she declares, drummer Steve Mugalian rattling a martial beat. "*Hate is my enemy, I have to fight it day and night/Love is the only weapon with which I have to fight*". Before the song subsides, Staples is shouting, "Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!"

The venue, her hometown Chicago Theatre, is a grand old lady in its own right, built more than a century ago yet still resplendent, from its red velvet seats and curtains to the gold filigree and pastel frescoes on the vaulted ceiling far above. The place is packed, and in the silence, Staples speaks. "We are here to be renewed," she intones, and the crowd comes to its feet. "Consoled." Cheering. "To get filled up."

Now we're away again, into a volley of songs written by others but remade in Mavis's image on her recent albums. There's "Hand Writing On The Wall", a modern gospel number she recorded as a duet with Levon Helm, here spiked with sticky Telecaster runs from her bandleader, Rick Holmstrom. Leagues more propulsive than the pensive version on her latest disc *Sad And Beautiful World*, "Beautiful Strangers" radiates strength.

Tom Waits' "Chicago" – on record, a rollicking, horn-fuelled blues with guitars courtesy of Buddy Guy and Derek Trucks – now has extra snap and snarl. Penned as a parable for the Great Migration that brought Pops Staples and millions more black workers from plantation south to industrial north in search of freedom and opportunity, it now describes the harrowing trek of migrants across the globe. "*I'm not alone, not afraid*", Mavis vows, her tone defiant.



DAVID MILLER

With bandleader Rick Holmstrom and drummer Steve Mugalian

Mavis Staples: ***"Hate is my enemy, I have to fight it day and night"***

"Freedom Highway" proves even more relevant – heartbreakingly so. Written by Pops in 1965 as a response to the brutal beating of civil rights marchers by police in Selma, Alabama, by 2008 it sounded like a celebration when Mavis included it on *Live: Hope At The Hideout*, the concert album she released to coincide with the election of President Barack Obama. Tonight's context is, once again, state violence: not batons cracking skulls this time, but bullets in a young woman's brain. History rhymes, even its dark parts.

But Staples has seen too much to wallow. You've got to keep marching, each and every day. "I have come too far," she says, "and I will not turn back." She revels in "Respect Yourself", the epic 1971 soul burner, Holmstrom digging deep to fill space that on the iconic recording is shared by keys, horns and Pops' guitar. "I feel good, y'all!" Mavis shouts. "She's on fire!" Holmstrom adds. A moment to sit in her chair, mop her brow or sip her tea are the only hints of weariness she'll concede.

She calls Rateliff to the stage. With their voices, Holmstrom's, and backing singers Kelly Hogan and Saundra Williams, "Friendship" – a tune from Pops' posthumous 2015 album *Don't Lose This* – has the feel of a secular hymn.

The crescendo comes with "The Weight". Recorded by The Staple Singers within weeks of its release on The Band's 1968 debut *Music From Big Pink*, it became a Mavis signature, thanks in no small part to her show-stealing performance in the concert film *The Last Waltz*. Rateliff takes one verse, Hogan – herself a local favourite for a different generation – nails another in her haunted wail. Then Mavis brings it home, leaning on all the gritty determination her voice has aged into. "*Put the load*", she nearly growls, repeating the phrase. "*Put the load on me*".

It's ecstatic, but not the end. That comes with the encore, the timeless chart-topper "I'll Take You There". Holmstrom fires off its spare, unmistakable riff, bassist Greg Boaz answers with the impossibly funky bassline, and Mavis sighs, "Uh huh." We're transported to that place where nobody's crying, nobody's worried. "We've been taking you there for more than 70 years," Staples reminds us. Outside, Chicago in January is dark and cold. Mavis dances into the wings.

ANDERS SMITH LINDALL

SETLIST

1. City In The Sky
2. I'm Just Another Soldier
3. Hand Writing On The Wall
4. Chicago
5. Beautiful Strangers
6. Freedom Highway
7. Respect Yourself
8. Human Mind
9. Friendship
10. The Weight
11. Heavy Makes You Happy (Sha-Na-Boom-Boom)
12. Everybody Needs Love

ENCORE

13. I'll Take You There

DAVID MILLER

Steel City memories: Mum looks down on Hawley and co

RICHARD HAWLEY

Sheffield City Hall, December 16

Two decades on, an emotional return to *Coles Corner*

"WELCOME to Sheffield" reads a road sign that Richard Hawley holds above his head, stepping onto the stage as swirling strings echo through the room, along with rapturous cheers. It's been 20 years since Hawley released his breakthrough album, *Coles Corner* – named after a local department store and popular meeting destination for courting couples – and he's celebrating by playing it in full with a string quartet and five-piece band over a three-night residency in his hometown.

It's a notable milestone for Hawley. Before he released *Coles Corner* – which ultimately became his best-selling album and was also nominated for the Mercury Prize – he thought it might be the end of the line. He was pushing 40, his previous label Setanta had folded, and he was so broke that he had to borrow the money from a friend to record his next batch of songs. It was the last roll of the dice. Tonight, however, those songs feel like classics, firmly embedded in the culture of the city Hawley so dearly loves.

The strings on opener "Coles Corner" are melodic and mournful, potent and poignant, bringing the song to life with both grace and force. The waltz-like number was always seeped in nostalgic romance, but now, two decades on – with its own lifespan, memories and romances attached – it feels even more evocative and moving. The album is played in chronological order, so the country shuffle of "Just Like The Rain" glides into the wistful "Hotel Room", before a beautifully tender "Darlin' Wait for Me".

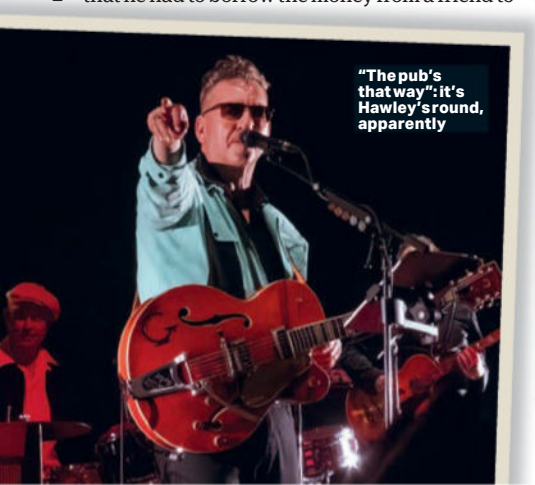
"The Ocean" is truly stunning, with the strings adding both deftness and weight. As it builds and then explodes it transforms into something else, with Hawley and longtime bandmate Shez Sheridan engaged in a lengthy guitar duel. "There's a reason we normally leave that fucker to the end," says Hawley, catching his breath.

It's a tough act to follow, but "Born Under A Bad Sign" is a fluid and graceful transition into side two of the album, ending on the traditional lullaby "Who's Gonna Shoe Your Pretty Little Feet?", which Hawley's mother used to sing to him as a child. Then the band burst into a euphoric "Tonight The Streets Are Ours", from *Coles Corner*'s 2007 follow-up *Lady's Bridge*, also named after a Sheffield landmark. It signals a gear-shift for the second half, into meatier, rockier territory.

"Standing At the Sky's Edge" is a powerhouse performance, unfurling like a South Yorkshire spaghetti western, as images of Sheffield's brutalist housing estate, Park Hill, are projected behind the band. The muscular, sinewy electric guitars – often recalling the raucous blasts of Link Wray – align neatly with the raw, exposed concrete and toughness of the buildings. Yet while the photos are black and white, there's a psychedelic hue to the pummelling sonic assault.

"Open Up Your Door" is gorgeous, as is the ode to Hawley's wife, "For Your Lover Give Some Time", before the full band and string section unite forcefully for a triumphant closing version of "Heart Of Oak". Hawley professes endless gratitude to the audience, reminding them that Coles Corner is not just the name of an album but a place where he used to busk as a young struggling musician. "Thanks for keeping us off the streets," he says, before inviting everyone down the pub. ***DANIEL DYLAN WRAY***

NICK BARBER



"The pub's that way": it's Hawley's round, apparently

SETLIST

COLES CORNER

1 Just Like The Rain
2 Hotel Room
3 Darlin' Wait For Me
4 The Ocean
5 Born Under A Bad Sign
6 I Sleep Alone
7 Tonight
8 (Wading Through) The Waters Of My Time
9 Who's Gonna Shoe Your Pretty Little Feet?
10 Tonight The Streets Are Ours
11 I'm Looking For Someone To Find Me
12 Don't Stare At The Sun
13 Standing At The Sky's Edge
14 Deep Space
15 Prism In Jeans
16 Open Up Your Door
17 Alone
18 Is There A Pill?

ENCORE

19 For Your Lover Give Some Time
20 'Tis Night
21 Heart Of Oak

Haircut One Hundred

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SUN	03	POOLE LIGHTHOUSE
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FRI	08	YORK BARBICAN
SAT	09	MANCHESTER ALBERT HALL
SUN	10	GLASGOW PAVILION THEATRE
THU	14	BATH FORUM
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SAT	16	BASINGSTOKE ANVIL
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12	MAY	MILTON KEYNES	20	MAY	LEEDS	27	MAY	WORTHING
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SCREEN

An academic on the run in 1970s Brazil; a Saharan search for a missing daughter; an animated childhood in '60s Japan...

The nocturnal side of reality: Wagner Moura (centre) stars in *The Secret Agent*

THE SECRET AGENT Last year, Walter Salles' *I'm Still Here* began as a rapturous love letter to the lost Rio of his youth. Kleber Mendonça Filho's *The Secret Agent* feels like that film's lurid and unruly twin. Both films look back at Brazil's "years of lead" military dictatorship through the wide eyes of the boys their directors once were. But where Salles' film unfurled into a sombre survey of the long, dogged fight for justice, Mendonça Filho offers a more phantasmagorical ride through the past, via its B-movies, pop songs and urban myths.

Set in Recife in the northeast of Brazil in 1977, the film follows Marcelo (Wagner Moura, superbly hangdog in a variety of period hairstyles), a fugitive university researcher finding some kind of asylum in a city boarding house. He's desperately trying to reconnect with his young son and find one last record of his lost mother. But the city is intoxicated with carnival and cinema, infested with corrupt cops, gangsters and hitmen, half crazed by paranoia, political intrigue and fever dreams.

Fantasy spills very vividly into everyday life. The whole country's obsession with *Jaws* (released in Brazil as *Tubarão*) becomes manifest when a shark is caught off the coast complete with a severed human leg in its belly. The leg becomes the film's most striking detail and takes on a life of its own as the "Perna Cabeluda" ("the hairy leg"), a hopping monster that stalks the city's parks at night. While it sounds like a surreal flourish, it's based on a genuine urban legend turned samizdat code: the Hairy Leg became a way for Recife journalists to report on police violence without alerting the censors.

Mendonça Filho films these sequences with grindhouse flair, but the whole film is a cineaste's delight, centred around Recife's grand Cinema São Luiz, where Marcelo's father-in-law works as a projectionist, showing not just *Jaws* but also *The Omen*, *King Kong*, *Close Encounters* and *Le Magnifique* (which obliquely provides the film's title). The film is heady with allusion, but this isn't the nerdy indulgence of a Tarantino, but rather a rich suggestion of the way that everyone, from the corrupt police chief to the would-be assassins, have their head filled with B-movie archetypes.

One Battle After Another is rightfully sweeping the board of the awards ceremonies, but in its own determined way, *The Secret Agent* might be the most authentically Pynchonian film of the year, reporting back from the nocturnal side of reality with nightmarish aplomb, devastating loss, and murderously black humour.

SIRÂT Director Oliver Laxe is shaping up to be modern cinema's austere poet of mystical revelation. *Mimosas* (2016) was the kind of film that Sufi poets might have made if they had invented the western in seventh-century Morocco. *Fire Will Come* (2019) was an infernal hymn to the Earth's destructive breath. Now *Sirāt* is a cinematic tone poem of wind and light – a staggering, transcendental road movie that feels like a pilgrimage to the end of the world.

Set against the scorched vistas of Saharan North Africa, the film follows a father (the dogged Sergi López) and his young son as they search for a missing daughter, apparently a convert to the crusty rave scene. But as they move deeper into the desert, the mission takes on the weight of an ancient myth. Laxe, working with cinematographer Mauro Herce, shoots the Sahara not as a wasteland, but as a living landscape of shifting sands and minefields.

The "Sirat" of the title refers to the razor-thin bridge over hell in Islamic eschatology, and the film exists in that exact state of precarity. There is a sense of encroaching spiritual collapse – an apocalyptic hum that resides in the silence between the characters. Most notably, Laxe tethers this transcendence to the ground with an infernal, percussive score by French electronic musician Kangding Ray. The soundtrack begins as a series of massive techno slaps – raw, industrial beats that mirror the illegal raves the characters inhabit – before gradually dematerialising into something more granular and ambient, as if the music itself is being eroded by the sandstorms.

Sirat is a demanding and at times unbearable watch, built on long takes and a narrative that refuses to provide easy catharsis. But the white-

REVIEWED THIS MONTH

THE SECRET AGENT
Directed by Kleber Mendonça Filho
Starring Wagner Moura, Maria Fernanda Cândido, Udo Kier
Certificate 15
Opens February 20
9/10

SIRÂT
Directed by Oliver Laxe
Starring Sergi López, Bruno Núñez, Stefania Gadda
Certificate 15
Opens February 27
8/10

IF I HAD LEGS I'D KICK YOU
Directed by Mary Bronstein
Starring Rose Byrne, Conan O'Brien, A$AP Rocky, Danielle Macdonald
Certificate 15
Opens February 20
7/10

THE TESTAMENT OF ANN LEE
Directed by Mona Fastvold
Starring Amanda Seyfried, Thomasin McKenzie, Lewis Pullman
Certificate To be confirmed
Opens February 20
7/10

LITTLE AMÉLIE
Directed by Maïlys Vallade, Liane-Cho Han
Starring Loïse Charpentier, Victoria Grosbois, Yumi Fujimori
Certificate PG
Opens February 27
8/10

knuckle tension remains compelling – this is a film that demands to be seen in a theatre and watched at maximum volume.

IF I HAD LEGS I'D KICK YOU The pivotal moment in *Marty Supreme*, the scene where the film becomes less a conventional sports biopic, more a biblical testament to the triumph of the nebbishy will, is when our hero takes a bath in a crumbling New York flophouse and falls through the floor, crushing Abel Ferrara's demonic mobster in the room below. Though Marty becomes responsible for the fate of the injured dog, Moses, he's characteristically free to flee and let others clean up the mess.

There's an uncanny echo of the scene near the start of *If I Had Legs...* when a frazzled, beleaguered mum, Linda, arrives home after another day of frustration and humiliation to find the ceiling of her living room collapsed and her home flooded. It's maybe not so coincidental: the film is directed by Mary Bronstein, wife of long-time Safdie Brothers conspirator Richard Bronstein, her film is co-produced by Josh Safdie and has been widely heralded as the *Uncut Gems* of maternal panic. Very pointedly, the mess is one more addition to Linda's never-ending list of responsibilities.

Rose Byrne is fiercely magnificent as Linda, a Montauk therapist failing to apply any of her professional tools to her own crumbling reality. Her family are nagging, abrasive offscreen voices: an unnamed daughter who suffers from a mysterious illness requiring a feeding tube and a constant, beeping vigilance and a husband (Christian Slater), a ship's captain stationed somewhere in the Atlantic.

The casting is inspired: Conan O'Brien provides a deadpan turn as Linda's own unsympathetic therapist, while A$AP Rocky offers some consolation as a motel super. And there's a bleak wit in Linda's spiral into maternal derangement – like *Eraserhead* told from the mom's perspective. But the film can feel suffocating. If Marty is a timid Ulysses, out wandering the world in search of purpose, Linda is an almost parodically long-suffering Penelope, trapped in her motel room, and plagued by infernal, endless trials, with no returning hero on the horizon.

THE TESTAMENT OF ANN LEE Having co-written the architectural epic *The Brutalist* with partner Brady Corbet, Mona Fastvold returns to the director's chair for a project of equally maddening ambition. *The Testament Of Ann Lee* is a 'Shaker Musical' – a 70mm fever dream that attempts to translate the ecstatic, celibate fervour of 18th-century Manchester into a language of percussive prayer and avant-garde folk song.

As Ann Lee, the woman who believed herself to be the female incarnation of Christ, Amanda Seyfried possesses a lunar intensity, leading her small band of Shaking Quakers across the Atlantic to the promised land of New York. The film is at its most potent when it gives itself over to the ritual. The songs composed by Daniel Blumberg (alumnus of Cajun Dance Party) and choreographed by Celia Rowlson-Hall are not showtunes; they are guttural, rhythmic possessions – limbs flailing and chests beating in a trance of suppressed desire and spiritual rapture.

However, where the craft is rhapsodic, the screenplay is surprisingly stiff. The dialogue creaks more than the transatlantic ships, burdened by a portentous mannerism and variable accents; while Seyfried clearly laboured over her Mancunian vowels, the surrounding cast offers a distracting patchwork of Northern tones that wander from Yorkshire to a vague Scottish twang. Narrated with a redundant, storybook-style delivery by Thomasin McKenzie, the film often feels like a series of gorgeous tableaus in search of a deeper character study.

> *Sirât* is demanding, but the white-knuckle tension remains compelling

LITTLE AMÉLIE In a time of ubiquitous CGI slop, the kind of international animated films that show up on the end-of-year awards list can feel as proudly, earnestly wholesome as organic farmer's market baby food in a world of chicken nuggets. *Little Amélie* certainly fits the part: a child's eye's view of 1960s Japan, seen from the perspective of a Belgian diplomat's daughter, told in limpid, rotoscopic pastel animation, paying loving homage to Studio Ghibli.

While it doesn't have the uncanny verve of Miyazaki or Takahata, there is much to enjoy. The film follows three-year-old Amélie, who spends her first two years in a 'deific' vegetative silence before a square of Belgian chocolate and a violent earthquake jolt her into a precocious, fast-talking consciousness.

What follows is a whimsical, occasionally twee, but frequently profound exploration of early childhood, as Amélie navigates her burgeoning ego, the cultural complexities of post-war Japan, and a deep, soul-shaping bond with her Japanese nanny, Nishio-san. ***STEPHEN TROUSSÉ***

Twinless

ALSO OUT...

TWINLESS
OPENS FEBRUARY 6
Dylan O'Brien and James Sweeney star in this Sundance Audience Award-winning dark comedy about two men who form an intense bond in a support group for those who have lost a twin.

THE CHRONOLOGY OF WATER
OPENS FEBRUARY 6
Kristen Stewart makes her feature directorial debut adapting Lidia Yuknavitch's memoir. Imogen Poots is a swimmer navigating a turbulent life of trauma, addiction and a swimming coach played by Kim Gordon.

100 NIGHTS OF HERO
OPENS FEBRUARY 6
Based on Isabel Greenberg's graphic novel, Julia Jackman's medieval fantasy stars Emma Corrin, Maika Monroe and Nicholas Galitzine. It's a whimsical, feminist tale where the power of storytelling is used to outwit a treacherous houseguest.

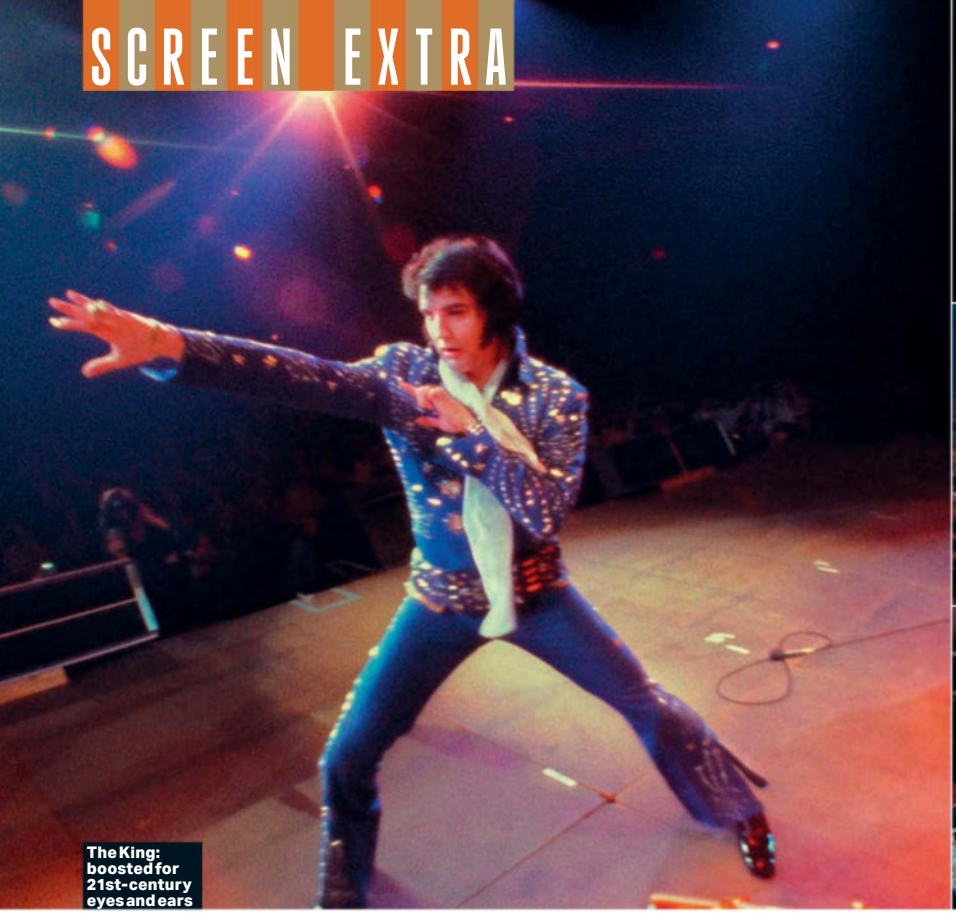
MY FATHER'S SHADOW
OPENS FEBRUARY 6
Akinola Davies Jr's Caméra d'Or-winning debut, set during the 1993 Nigerian election crisis, is a poetic portrait of two brothers reconnecting with their estranged father (Ṣọpẹ́ Dìrísù) on the streets of Lagos.

HAMLET
OPENS FEBRUARY 6
Riz Ahmed plays the Prince of Denmark in Aneil Karia's adaptation, trading the Danish castle for a gritty, contemporary London, co-starring Morfydd Clark and Joe Alwyn.

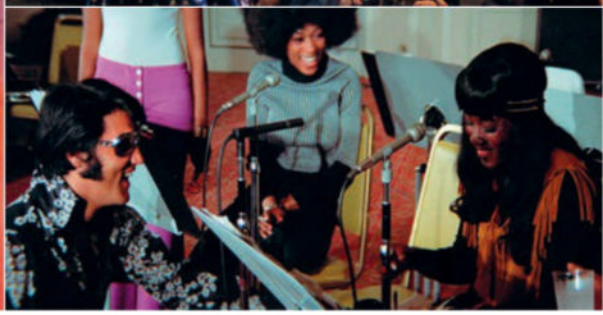
WUTHERING HEIGHTS
OPENS FEBRUARY 13
Emerald Fennell goes lurid gothic in her idiosyncratic take on the Brontë classic starring Margot Robbie and Jacob Elordi.

THE PRESIDENT'S CAKE
OPENS FEBRUARY 13
Hasan Hadi's debut is set in 1990s Iraq, where a young girl must scramble to find ingredients for Saddam Hussein's compulsory birthday cake. A tense, child's-eye view of life in a dictatorship.

COLD STORAGE
OPENS FEBRUARY 13
Keery and Georgina Campbell play night-shift workers fighting a sentient, mutating fungus operative in this sci-fi comedy horror.



The King: boosted for 21st-century eyes and ears



EPiC: ELVIS PRESLEY IN CONCERT

IN IMAX FEB 20 AND EVERYWHERE FEB 27

8/10

Unseen footage from live films, sonically and visually reimagined

BAZ Luhrmann's 2022 biopic of Elvis played fast and loose with facts, but nevertheless understood the convulsive excitement of its hero's explosive arrival in the 1950s. The film culminated with Presley's final performance, in 1977, during which its star Austin Butler morphed into real archive footage of Presley.

Luhrmann's *EPiC: Elvis Presley In Concert* continues where those final minutes left off, using 59 hours of unseen footage from the live films *Elvis: That's The Way It Is* (1970) and *Elvis On Tour* (1972) unearthed during the filmmakers research for the biopic, and combining it with radically reimagined audio to produce an IMAX-ready, contemporary Elvis show.

Elvis's life and music is meanwhile explained in his own words, drawn from press conferences and onstage chat. Peter Jackson's technical team applied the restorative miracles pioneered on *Get Back*, to which Luhrmann's crew add their own intensive work. Like Giles Martin's Beatles remasters, the sound is boosted for 21st-century ears, while footage now resembles the sensory overload of Brett Morgen's immersive Bowie doc *Moonage Daydream*. Luhrmann's intent to remake and remodel goes still further. "What if in a world where AI can make all sorts of illusions," he's explained, "the illusions were made from authentic and original material and restored with meticulous human craft?"

Little is truly revelatory. The performance-heavy 2000 re-edit of *Elvis: That's The Way It Is* revealed the singer's majesty and musical command during the early Vegas shows, while Presley's thoughts are equally familiar from countless concert boxsets. The thunderous, bass-heavy mix meanwhile leaves some tracks with little light and shade. This does, though, suit the maximalist nature of Elvis's '70s show, from his "Also Sprach Zarathustra" intro music to the panoramic "An American Trilogy", which Luhrmann splices into a single grand prelude here.

This is billed as 'Baz Luhrmann's EPiC', and as Elvis's '50s flit by in five minutes, with his infamously jiggling hips sped up and slowed, the director's own jittery tics seems set to overwhelm his subject. Still, precious glimpses of pre-Army Elvis's snake-hipped looseness and grease-stiff quiff convey his outrageous arrival.

"What about the rumour that you shot your mother?" an interviewer asks. "I don't feel like I've done anything wrong," young Elvis smoulders. This is followed by a bravura, Pop Art mash-up of 20 Elvis movies which is worth the price of admission on its own. Blazing Technicolor, interchangeable Elvises spiral around an acid trip reimagining of the forgotten 1968 track "Edge Of Reality" as he talks to a dog, in a cheeky psychedelic version of his blandest decade.

> An heroic presentation of Elvis, blown up to monumental size

Luhrmann's hyperactivity pauses with Elvis behind the curtain at the Las Vegas International Hotel. In the dark backstage, he glides forward, his quiff preceding him like a ship's prow. There is light, screams and the concert begins. "I just do whatever I feel on stage," he says, and whether singing with a fan-tossed black bra on his head or lying on the floor with legs casually crossed ("I'll get up in a minute. Just hang loose..."), he operates by his own improvised rules. Key songs are presented as AI-smoothed composites, resulting in an especially filthy "Polk Salad Annie" ("I wanna eat your fanny," the supposedly wholesome singer mutters), and you can feel the stage's red heat as outtake footage gets us close to the star.

Scorsese helped edit *Elvis On Tour* and it shows. *EPiC*'s closing section drawn from its footage of the singer's 1972 journey into America is thrilling. Now dressed as a bat-caped superhero, he confronts vast arenas of fans and moves between phalanxes of motorcycle cops. "ELVIS OUR KING" a placard says, and he looks energised among his people. The grubbier reality and decline glimpsed in the original film is excised. This is a purely heroic presentation of Elvis, sonically and visually blown up to monumental size, commensurate with the performer Luhrmann looks at with love. ***NICK HASTED***

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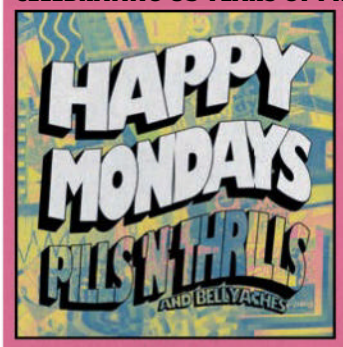

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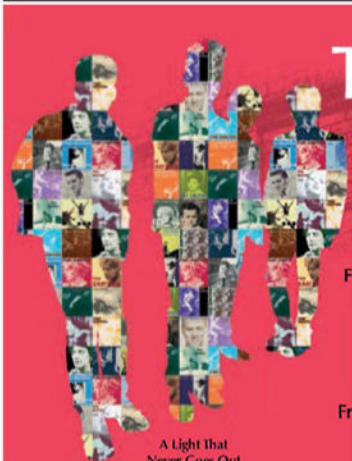

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BOOKS

In "a junkyard of surrealistic mayhem": Adele Bertei in New York City, September 1988

ON her first trip to New York in February 1977, Adele Bertei finds herself in the West Village apartment of gonzo rock critic Lester Bangs. A visitor from Cleveland, Bertei has been gifted a round-trip ticket by her friend Peter Laughner. Bangs' apartment is exactly as you'd expect: littered with pizza boxes, beer cans, typed pages, pharmaceuticals. On that first night, they head to CBGB to see the Ramones. Bertei – no slouch with the critical capsule review herself – notes that Joey Ramone is like "Ronnie Spector with a head cold". Then it's back to Lester's place, where the critic digs out his copy of Charles Mingus's *The Black Saint And The Sinner Lady*, and the record plays out into the darkness, "the hums sounding like so many yellow taxis, cymbals and the night, shimmering out there as I imagined lovers, mothers, drug fiends, workers, runaway kids. Ghosts from every corner of the world walking this avenue below me..."

On her second trip to New York, the adventure continues. It's back to CBGB to see Suicide. The support band, Mars, have a female drummer and guitarist, which is impressive. Suicide are Suicide, with Alan Vega "dolled up as a gay hustler on 53rd and 3rd". Midway through the epic disturbance of "Frankie Teardrop", Bertei receives the news that Laughner has died.

No New York is Bertei's third volume of memoir. The first, *Peter And The Wolves*, detailed her friendships with Laughner and photographer Nan Goldin. The second, *Twist*, was a coming-of-age tale with a seam of family trauma. The episodic *No New York*, as the title suggests, focuses on that fertile period in the mid-1970s when punk collided with art on the derelict streets of Manhattan, where walking on Avenue A felt "as if I'd landed in an outdoor prison camp", and the East Village was "our very own junkyard of surrealistic mayhem".

Yes, it's romantic. There is a keen sense of yearning for the youthful possibilities of pre-gentrified New York, and a hint of wonder from Bertei that she was there when all of this stuff was new and cheap and possible. Inspired by Laughner and the explosive agitation of the no wave scene, Bertei signs up to play Ace Tone organ with James Chance And The Contortions. The band have an ethos based on primitivism not technique, and it is a point of pride that their live show prompts the legendary A&R man, Clive Davis, to run for the exit before the first song is over.

Bertei highlights the importance of women to no wave. Her encounters include writer Kathy Acker, filmmaker Lizzie Borden, Patti Smith ("the pied piper") and Madonna, whose recording career runs briefly in parallel with Bertei's post-Contortions dance phase. Lydia Lunch gets a special mention, decapitating a Ken doll on their first hello.

Bertei's views on the notable men she encounters are more nuanced. James Chance is portrayed as a racist bigot. Brian Eno (who employs Bertei as an assistant) is more fondly drawn, with just a flicker of absurdity. To create the right ambience for the recording of the *No New York* album he installs an ioniser in the studio, explaining that negative ions "create a feeling like the air stirred by the oceans". Bertei notes drily, "It wasn't exactly the energy we were looking for, but hey..."

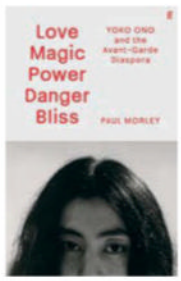
There is a sad cameo from Sid Vicious. Bertei serves him PG Tips. "He looked broken, delicate and utterly lost." Nancy Spungen, she suggests in a rare unsisterly moment, was "Beelzebub with a bad dye job."

IN **Love Magic Power Danger Bliss**, Paul Morley rescues Yoko Ono from popular resentment. The Beatles barely feature, and when they do, Morley upends the mythology so that the musicians are bit players. In Morley's re-telling, Lennon and Ono become a conjoined artwork, the "Johnandyoko", and Ono's appearance in Peter Jackson's documentary *Get Back* is reframed as her "Studio Piece", with the artist following her own directions: "Look interested. Look away. Gaze nowhere. Knit. Eat. Read." It's a bracing read in which Morley's enthusiasm for avant-garde disturbance is rendered as both a catalogue and a manifesto.

GIRL To Country is Amy Rigby's second memoir, in which she moves to Nashville with the dream of establishing herself as a songwriter. She is, she notes, "too old to play the ingénue" and – this takes longer to become obvious – too leftfield to play the game. One Nashville review highlights the "fuzz of dislocation" in her songs, and the hum grows louder as Rigby's attempts to fit in tempt her into a relationship with a clean-cut guy who appears at her merch table. That relationship plays out like a Loretta Lynn song, but Rigby's memoir is closer to Viv Albertine's *Clothes, Music, Boys* in its portrayal of the quotidian business of being a working musician and a mother in middle age. Rigby compares it to "twenty years of running a marathon in cheap, used sneakers". Happily, she keeps on choogling. ***ALASTAIR McKAY***

REVIEWED THIS MONTH

NO NEW YORK
ADELE BERTEI
FABER, £20
8/10



LOVE MAGIC POWER DANGER BLISS: YOKO ONO AND THE AVANT-GARDE DIASPORA
PAUL MORLEY
FABER, £25
8/10

GIRL TO COUNTRY
AMY RIGBY
SOUTHERN DOMESTIC, £15
8/10

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THE Move 2 is a proper Sonos multiroom speaker at home, and offers the flexibility to take it out and about and use it with Wi-Fi or Bluetooth from your phone. And it brings a slew of improvements over the older version: an updated interface, stereo capability and drastically extended battery life.

Like its predecessor, it's quite weighty at 3kg. It's 24cm tall and IP56 water-resistant, with a wireless charging stand (a pleasingly long 2m cable is supplied) and a rubberised base housing the battery.

Coming in a new outdoorsy green, as well as the usual black and white matt finishes, the new design is very similar to the older model. There's just a new volume slider alongside the other touch controls for normal audio functions.

But Sonos has completely reworked the audio. The newly introduced dual tweeters and mid-range woofer really do pack a punch. There's no spatial audio like the Era 300 or Arc soundbar, but that's hardly surprising and surely won't be a dealbreaker for most. And you can adjust the EQ in-app. The Sonos Trueplay tuning tech is supported on Android as well as iOS (with older devices it was limited to Apple devices); and the wireless capability is such that you can use it to play Bluetooth audio to the rest of your Sonos system. You can also stereo-pair it with another Move 2, but not with an original Move.

There's support for Sonos's own voice assistant as well as Alexa. The integration with Amazon's assistant is smooth and pretty responsive – we're far from the early days of its patchy appearance on the Sonos One. There's support for AirPlay 2 and Spotify Connect too.

But the biggest boon is the battery life, which has increased from 11 to 24hrs – meaning you can take it away for a few days without issue. This also makes it a much more appealing option for locations in the house where having a power cable dangling would be unacceptable.

The USB-C socket supports audio-in, though you will need an additional adapter (£39). So you could even build a multiroom setup by plugging one Move 2 into your dear old turntable then using it to send music to a bunch of others via Bluetooth.

10/10

AMAZON ECHO SPOT

£80

If you're going for an Alexa multiroom music system and want to add an outpost to your bedroom, then the Amazon Echo Spot – which serves as a smart speaker and alarm clock – is a good bet. While it won't be on any audiophile's wish list, it offers decent sound (a real improvement from the original Spot) for such a compact speaker – good for listening to podcasts in bed and for your wake-up playlist. We like its fun design, the ability to customise the screen and the fact that it allows you to control other compatible smart home devices, so you can get really lazy.

8/10

JBL AUTHENTICS 300

£300

If you're a sucker for retro design, you'll love the classic look of the JBL Authentics 300 – which, as well as looking good in pretty much any room, will fill it with stereo sound. Delicate details in your music are handled by two 1in tweeters, the full range is catered for with a 5.25in woofer, and the down-firing 6.5in passive radiator delivers deep bass. A decent 8hrs of playing time makes it ideal for using out and about, as well as at home. You can boss it about with voice control, and create a multiroom system using Alexa Multi-Room Music.

9/10

DENON HOME 150 NV

£189

Going for an upmarket Denon multiroom system? The Home 150 NV is the newest in the lineup and offers the same exceptional sound quality as the Home 150 but minus the mics and voice assistants for people/rooms with no need for them. This compact smart speaker works with AirPlay2 and has Denon's HEOS built in, so you can enjoy all your music from any room in your home. The top of the unit is home to three 'quick select' buttons, so you can access your top internet radio stations without having to search.

9/10

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Not Fade Away

Fondly remembered this month...

CHRIS REA

Reluctant blues-rock superstar

(1951–2025)

CHRIS Rea was forever drawn to the road, calling it "a metaphor for where we're going in life". It was also, one way or another, a means of inspiration. "Driving Home For Christmas" was conceived in December 1978, when the singer and guitarist was returning to Middlesbrough from London, only to get caught in snowbound traffic. Clocking his miserable fellow motorists, Rea began singing the title in jest. Similarly, 1989's "The Road To Hell" emerged after being stuck on the M4-M25 interchange during rush hour.

Fearful of being saddled with a signature festive song, Rea hadn't initially wanted "Driving Home For Christmas" to be released at all – a saga that was indicative of his difficult relationship with the music business. The title of 1978 debut *Whatever Happened To Benny Santini?* was a sly dig at Magnet Records' failed attempt to make him more showbiz. The label had patronisingly suggested the stage name thanks to his Irish-Italian father owning an ice-cream business.

The album provided Rea with a major US hit in the form of "Fool (If You Think It's Over)". Typically, however, he refused to tour the States to promote it. His full UK breakthrough, meanwhile, took a little longer. Seventh album *Shamrock Diaries* (1985) initiated a commercial run that included the million-selling *On The Beach* and *Dancing With Strangers*, refining his trademark vocal rasp and liquid slide guitar-playing, gleaned from formative years listening to Charlie Patton, Blind Willie Johnson and Ry Cooder. Rea's success peaked with 1989's multi-platinum *The Road To Hell* and 1991 follow-up *Auberge*, both of which topped the UK chart.

His way and the highway: Chris Rea, London, 1988

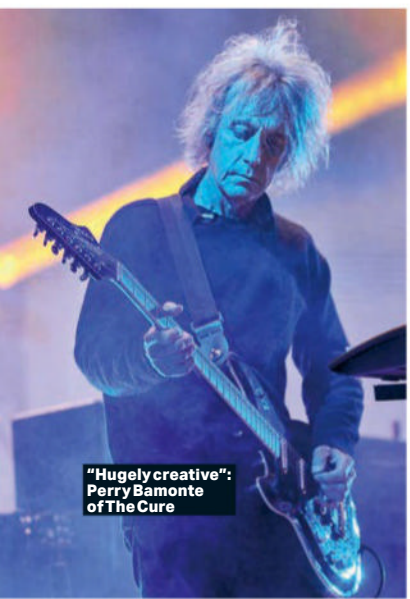
Various health issues, the most serious of which saw him recover from pancreatic cancer, led Rea to later reassess his priorities. He returned to his blues roots, minting his own Jazzee Blue label to release 2002's *Dancing Down The Stony Road*. It set the tone for the remainder of his life. "I was never a rock star or pop star," he told *Saga* in 2009, "and all the illness has been my chance to do what I'd always wanted to do with music." His final collection of all-new material was 2017's fittingly titled *Road Songs For Lovers*.

PERRY BAMONTE

The Cure favourite

(1960–2025)

Initially part of The Cure's road crew, keyboardist and guitar player Perry Bamonte became a full-time band member in 1990, making his recorded debut two years later on *Wish*. His tenure lasted 15 years, after which he joined Love Amongst Ruin for 2015's *Lose Your Way*. Bamonte reunited with The Cure – who called him "quiet, intensive, intuitive, constant and hugely creative" – in 2022.



"Hugely creative": Perry Bamonte of The Cure

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES; BARRY BRECHEISEN/WIREIMAGE

MICK ABRAHAMS

Jethro Tull original

(1943–2025)

Previously with McGregor's Engine, powerful guitarist Mick Abrahams co-founded Jethro Tull in December 1967. He quit after the following year's *This Was*, largely because of musical conflicts with Ian Anderson, to form the blues-rooted Blodwyn Pig. That group split two albums later, upon which Abrahams began recording solo and with various iterations of his own band. He revived Blodwyn Pig in 1993.

EDDIE THORNTON

Jamaican trumpeter

(1931–2025)

Eddie "Tan Tan" Thornton played in Roy Coulton's band before relocating to London in 1954. During the '60s he recorded with Georgie Fame And The Blue Flames, The Beatles ("Got To Get You Into My Life"), the Stones ("She's A Rainbow") and Small Faces, whose "Eddie's Dreaming" was named in his honour. He later worked with Aswad and Kitty, Daisy & Lewis.

ANDREW BODNAR

The Rumour bassist

(1954–2026)

Andrew Bodnar co-founded The Rumour, who quickly became synonymous with Graham Parker, in 1975. The band initially recorded five albums backing Parker, plus three of their own, during which time Bodnar also brought reggae vibes to Elvis Costello's "Watching The Detectives" and co-wrote Nick Lowe's "I Love The Sound Of Breaking Glass". He reunited with Parker from 1988 onwards.

MAX EIDER

Jazz Butcher guitarist

(1961–2025)

Under the pseudonym of Max Eider, guitarist Peter Millson formed The Jazz Butcher with singer-songwriter Pat Fish in 1982. His clean, fluid style was a key feature of their first four albums, though Eider quit to go solo with 1987's *The Best Kisser In The World*, before reconnecting with Fish in the late '90s. He also recorded with ex-Bauhaus bassist David J.

AMOS POE

Punk filmmaker

(1949–2025)

Alongside co-director Ivan Král, Amos Poe documented Manhattan's emergent punk scene with 1976's *The Blank Generation*, showcasing performances by Television, Richard Hell, Ramones, Blondie, Talking Heads and Patti Smith. He also wrote and directed no-wave films like *Unmade Beds* and *The Foreigner*, both featuring Debbie Harry. In 2003, he made Steve Earle documentary *Just An American Boy*.

DON BRYANT

Ann Peebles' partner

(1942–2025)

The teenage Don Bryant fronted Willie Mitchell's R&B band in Memphis during the '50s. Having briefly recorded solo, he became a staff songwriter at Hi Records, where Mitchell teamed him with future wife Ann Peebles. The pair's biggest success was 1973's "I Can't Stand The Rain". Bryant resumed his recording career with 2017's *Don't Give Up On Love*.

TONY CARR

CCS drummer

(1927–2026)

Maltese jazz percussionist Tony Carr moved to London in the early '50s, eventually becoming an in-demand session player. He appeared on two albums with Alexis Korner's CCS, who landed a UK hit with Led Zeppelin's "Whole

ANTONY PRICE

Roxy Music stylist

(1945–2025)

Style guru: Antony Price at The Connaught hotel, London, January 28, 2017

"I WANTED something that would reflect the music, amplify the feel," Bryan Ferry told *Another Man* in 2000, recalling Antony Price's contribution to the cover of Roxy Music's 1972 debut LP. "And Antony was just genius. It all came together like magic... It was a dream come true to see these wonderful images we'd created."

Having met one night at London's Speakeasy, Ferry had asked Price ("the coolest designer around") if he'd be interested in working with his new band. The Royal College of Art alumnus, whose prior form included Mick Jagger's hip-hugging button trousers for the Stones' 1969 tour of America, duly changed rock's visual language, bringing fantastical glamour to Roxy's retrofuturist aesthetic. He envisaged cover girl Kari-Ann Moller dressed like a Neapolitan ice cream and created dandified stage looks for each band member on the inner gatefold.

Among the other memorable images from Price's lengthy association with Roxy Music were Amanda Lear's sculptured leather dress on *For Your Pleasure*, a rock-crawling Jerry Hall adorning *Siren*, and the noir-like luxuriance of Ferry's 1985 solo effort, *Boys And Girls*, for which he served as photographer. By then, Price was hosting extravaganzas in London, at venues like Camden Palace and the Hippodrome, that wed fashion to pop music. His work also crossed over into music videos: Duran Duran wore his silk pastel suits for the "Rio" shoot; David Bowie was tailored by Price on his "As The World Falls Down" promo.

Price's long list of latter-day clients included Tilda Swinton, Steve Strange and Daphne Guinness. The highlight of his final salon show, a collaboration with the 16Arlington label last November, was a black velvet 'revenge dress' modelled by Lily Allen. A lengthy tribute on Ferry's website hailed Price as "one of the most significant and influential British fashion designers of the last century".

Lotta Love" in 1970. Carr also played (uncredited) on Hot Chocolate's "You Sexy Thing" and was involved with Paul McCartney's Rockestra.

KEN DOWNIE

The Black Dog boffin

(DOB UNKNOWN – 2025)

The Black Dog, led by Ken Downie, emerged from Sheffield's fertile electronic scene in 1989. After several EPs, the trio debuted on Warp with 1993's *Bytes*, though Andy Turner and Ed Handley soon left to form Plaid. Downie continued to record under The Black Dog moniker, eventually recruiting Richard and Martin Dust. Their final release was last year's *Loud Ambient*.

TERRY SULLIVAN

Renaissance drummer

(1938–2026)

Terry Sullivan was a member of psych-rockers Dry Ice prior to joining the prog-leaning Renaissance in 1972. He appeared on their run of albums spanning *Prologue* and 1979's *Azure d'Or*, after which he formed the Good Ol' Boys with ex-Deep Purple bassist Nick Simper. Sullivan later released *South Of Winter* (2005) as founder of Renaissant.

BÉLA TARR

Hungarian arthouse director

(1955–2026)

Béla Tarr's distinctive style of filmmaking – lingering takes, austere black-and-white visuals, existential themes – made him a founding father of the slow cinema genre, drawing admiration from fellow directors such as Jim Jarmusch and Gus Van Sant. He began with 1979's *Family Nest*, though is probably most celebrated for seven-hour drama *Sátántangó* (1994) and the desolate *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000).

JERRY KASENETZ

Bubblegum pop pioneer

(1943–2025)

Together with Jeffry Katz, his fellow producer at Super K Productions, Jerry Kasenetz popularised bubblegum pop with The Music Explosion's million-selling cover of "Little Bit O' Soul", which made the *Billboard* Top 5 in 1967. Further hits included The Ohio Express's "Yummy Yummy Yummy" and the 1910 Fruitgum Company's "Simon Says".

JAMES GRAUERHOLZ

Burroughs bibliographer

(1952–2026)

Writer, editor and musician James Grauerholz was best known for his association with William S Burroughs, serving as bibliographer and business manager until his death in 1997, after which he became estate executor. Sometime member of the band Tank Farm, Grauerholz issued a solo collection, *Life's Too Good To Keep*, in 2024.

HOWIE KLEIN

DJ and record exec

(1948–2025)

Howie Klein's reputation was forged in late-'70s San Francisco, championing punk as a DJ on KSAN-FM and co-founding indie imprint 415, home to The Nuns, Wire Train and more. In 1987 he joined Sire Records, famously recruiting Lou Reed for the career-reviving *New York*, before overseeing Warner's Reprise label, a post he held until 2001.

MATT KWASNIEWSKI-KELVIN

Black Midi man

(1999–2026)

Guitarist Matt Kwasniewski-Kelvin co-founded experimental rockers Black Midi in 2017, appearing on Mercury-nominated debut *Schlagenheim* two years later. He quit the south London quartet in early 2021 citing mental health issues, but not before co-writing two songs on their second album, *Cavalcade*.

KENNY MORRIS

Banshees drummer

(1957–2026)

Formerly of The Flowers Of Romance, Kenny Morris joined Siouxsie And The Banshees in January 1977. His singular approach – favouring sparse tom-tom rhythms over cymbals and hi-hats – was a crucial component of *The Scream* and 1979's *Join Hands*, though he and guitarist John McKay quit the band following an argument a few dates into the subsequent tour. A successful painter and gallery owner in recent times, Morris's memoir is due later this year.

Kenny Morris, March 1979

MICHAEL LIPPMAN

Bowie manager

(1946–2025)

David Bowie employed US law graduate Michael Lippman as his representative and manager in 1971, a tenure that lasted until December '75. His other major client was George Michael, first in the late '80s and again post-millennium. He also managed Bernie Taupin and Matchbox Twenty.

JIM McBRIDE

Nashville hitmaker

(1947–2026)

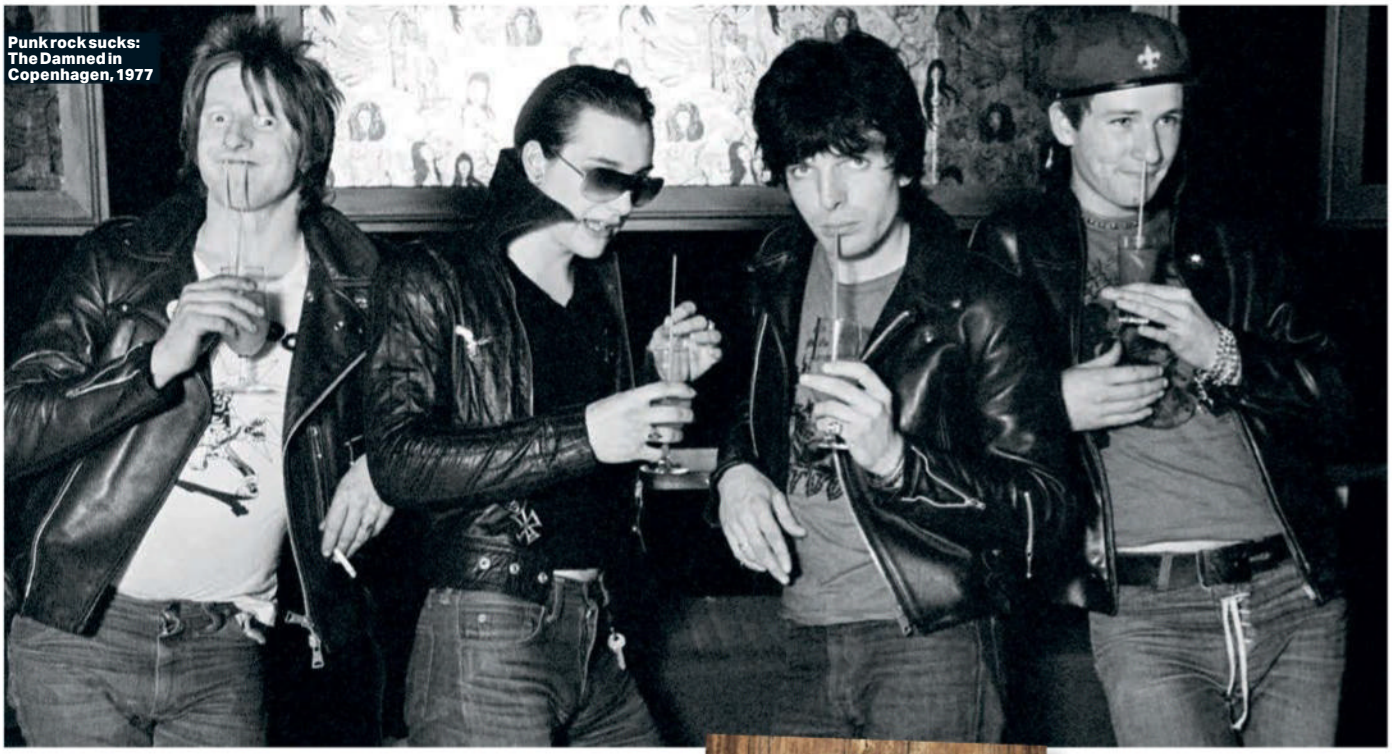
Songwriter Jim McBride saw his songs covered by Johnny Cash, George Jones and Willie Nelson, but his most successful association was with Alan Jackson, co-authoring huge country hits like "Chattahoochee", "Chasing That Neon Rainbow" and "(Who Says) You Can't Have It All" during the '90s.

ROB HUGHES

DAVID M. BENETT/DAVEBENETT/GETTY IMAGES; FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Feedback

Send your brickbats, bouquets, reminiscences, textual critiques, billets-doux and all forms of printable correspondence to letters@uncut.co.uk



Punk rock sucks: The Damned in Copenhagen, 1977

NEAT NEAT NEAT

Thank you for finally putting The Damned on the cover [Take 347]. It reminded me of when I saw them supporting the Ramones at Brixton Academy, December 1991, which was also the first concert I went to with my girlfriend. Cerys' main knowledge of The Damned was from "lovely" Captain Sensible's single "Happy Talk" a few years earlier. She was slightly surprised when he came out with some extremely strong expletives aimed at the audience, but luckily they were brilliant (opening with "New Rose"), and we are still together with several thousand concerts attended since then.

Thanks as always for the excellent magazine and CD each month from a lifelong subscriber.

Dan Wolff, via email

EMMY REWARD

Many thanks for the excellent Emmylou Harris article in Take 348. I saw her with the Hot Band and the picture of her with them bought back great memories of that concert. In particular, it was good to see one of my favourite guitarists Albert Lee in the photo. I have lost count of the number of times I have seen him over the years, and although his hair is not quite as dark as in the picture he still plays as good as he did then! I may have missed it but if not already done, a feature on Albert would be very welcome indeed. His long career and achievements are well worth celebrating.

Steve Taylor, via email

MEET YOUR MACCA

Thank you for the wonderful retrospective on *The Beatles Anthology* and its rerelease [*Uncut* Take 346, Review Of The Year 2025]. In hindsight, we were so lucky even to have three remaining Beatles still alive in the '90s to remember old times and chart the epic rise and descent one more time.

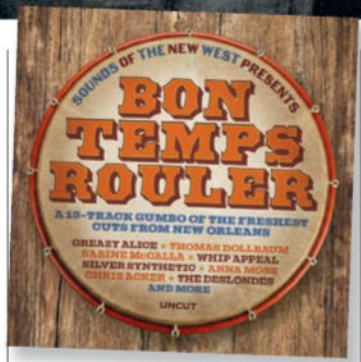
I was lucky enough to see Paul on his 2025 tour in Albuquerque and Chicago. He was like a pop evangelist reminding us to keep the faith no matter how bleak our global times of trouble. I recommend the UK comes out and sees him if he tours Europe this year; he'll definitely take a sad song and, however briefly, make it better.

Stephen Conn, New Mexico, USA

DETAILED CRITIQUE

Let the good times roll, indeed. Thanks for the latest *Sounds Of The New West* sampler [*Bon Temps Rouler*; *Uncut* Take 348], this time from Louisiana.

I loved the piano playing counterpoint on Whip Appeal's witty "No Cowboys In Texas". Very reminiscent of Billy Payne of Little Feat. And the harmonica solo intro to The Deslondes' "Grand Junction" could have been from a spaghetti western soundtrack, while the lyrics were a modern update of Johnny Cash.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AND MORE
UNCUT

Keep 'em coming!

Maurice Chittenden, Teston, Kent

I CAUGHT LAURA

Great to see your in-depth feature on Laura Nyro in the last issue [Take 347]. I've been a fan for quite a few years, but I rarely seem to read that much about her.

As Rob Hughes' article shows, there was a fascinating backstory behind her songs – as well as plenty of frustrating episodes that shed light on why her career was such a stop-start affair. I first got

Enigmatic figure: Laura Nyro, New York, November 1968

JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS; MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

into her from the late '90s compilation *Stoned Soul Picnic*, but by that time I found out she'd already passed away, at the tragically young age of 49. She seems an enigmatic figure to me, and your piece really provided some great insights. Such a sad loss that she died before the internet age could have seen her work spread to a bigger audience – although of course as a long-time fan there's something nice about feeling a sense of ownership over her. Not sure how I'd feel if the rest of the world were belatedly catching up and jumping on the bandwagon!

Then again, I use *Uncut* for precisely that reason – filling gaps in my musical knowledge is a lifetime's quest! It's one of the things I love about *Uncut*; I realise the big names – The Beatles, the Stones, the Bowies – are a big draw for a lot of readers but you folks regularly feature more obscure stuff and turn me onto that, as well as entirely new music (can't tell you how many new artists I've got into from the CDs and 'On the *Uncut* Stereo' recommendations).

I also like the fact you shine a deserved spotlight on female artists: in the same issue, I was prompted to check out the new album by Melody's Echo Chamber, as well as reading about Cat Power, Courtney Marie Andrews and Dry Cleaning (OK, that last one is a band, but still female-led) as well as features on Dionne Warwick and Pauline Black. I notice there's a good representation of female voices among your writers, which isn't always the case in the blokey world of music writing.

Thanks again for your monthly consignment of great reads and welcome inspiration.

Jamie Davison, Aylesbury

LUCKY MAN

I'm afraid the band on the picture that goes with the article about Link Wray (*Uncut*, Take 347) isn't Link Wray And The Wraymen. I think it's (Lucky Wray And) The Palomino Ranch Gang. Lucky Wray (front right) was Link's older brother Vernon. Far right, Link's younger brother Doug.

As far as I know the story of the creation of "Rumble" is a little different. Link was asked to play a dance called the stroll, not the hit "The Stroll" by The Diamonds.

Peter Bruinsma, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands

Crossword

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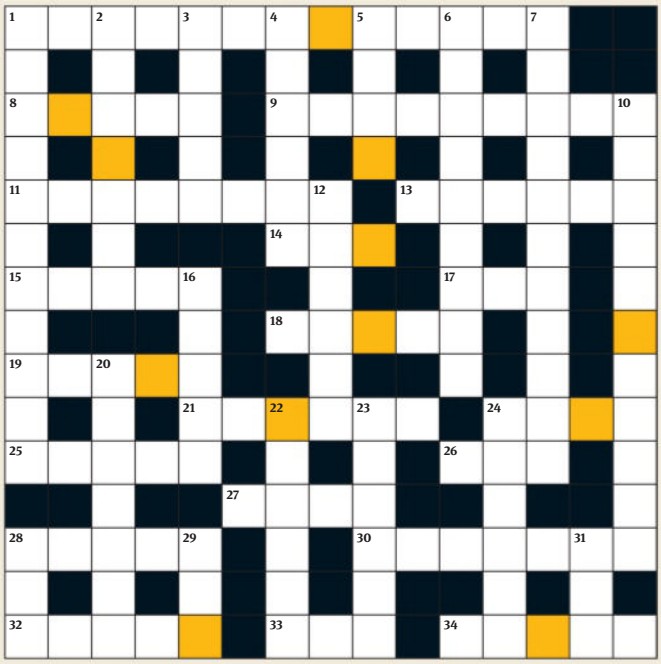

HOW TO ENTER

The letters in the shaded squares form an anagram of a song by **The Velvet Underground**. When you've worked out what it is, email your answer to: *competitions@uncut.co.uk*. The first correct entry picked at random will win £50 of Rough Trade vouchers to spend online. Closing date: **Thursday, Feb 26, 2026**. This competition is only open to European residents.

CLUES ACROSS

1+1D Honestly, this sounds just like Manic Street Preachers. What do you reckon, honestly? (4-2-2-5-4-2-5)
8 "*Caught between the longing for love and the struggle for the_____ tender*", from Jackson Browne's "The Pretender" (5)
9 Trump's wok stirs up something from Dry Cleaning (9)
11 US industrial metal band with a view of the *Dark Side Of The Spoon* (8)
13 They may or may not have been a backing band for Graham Parker (6)
14 Their 23rd album released in 2023 was *Mirror To The Sky* (3)
15 Give way to pressure from Pearl Jam (5)
17 "The Great ___ In The Sky", track on Pink Floyd's *Dark Side Of The Moon* (3)
18 Group that began life in the '60s as The N'Betweens (5)
19 "*I had an_____ who once played for Red Star Belgrade*", from Billy Bragg's "Sexuality" (5)
21+27A Group of people from the underground scene becoming an influential punk band (6-4)
24 A quiet spell amongst the Smashing Pumpkins' releases (4)
25 Scottish punk group whose biggest hit was "Into The Valley" (5)
26 Scouse group fronted by Lee Mavers (3)
27 (See 21 across)
28 (See 5 down)
30 Can more be arranged for this Fontaines DC album? (7)
32 "*Please let me introduce myself, I'm a man of wealth and_____*", from The Rolling Stones' "Sympathy For The Devil" (5)
33 "*I gotta find a new place where the kids are___*", from The Beach Boys' "I Get Around" (3)
34 Vice_____, punk band fronted by Beki Bondage (5)

CLUES DOWN

1 (See 1 across)
2 Genuine mistake made by kd lang on album (7)
3 Friday's headline final act on the Other Stage at Glastonbury 2024 (5)
4 "*To spend your lives in sin and_____, in the house of the rising sun*", The Animals (6)
5+28A A genuine belief that this is the sound of New Order (4-5)
6 Socket to me, Eric Clapton (9)
7 Australian rock band fronted by Dave Faulkner (6-5)
10 "I Am A Rock" ELP version named by Radiohead (5-6)
12 "*I wrote a song for you*" and those were part of the lyrics (6)
16 "*Rebel, rebel, you've torn your_____*", David Bowie (5)
20 "*Come writers and_____ who prophesise with your pens*", from Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are A-Changin'" (7)
22 How Nirvana cleaned up with their debut album (6)
23 "*In the naughty north and in the sexy south, we're all singing I've got the mouth*", 1981 (3-3)
24 Steve_____, DJ responsible for indie alt-rock *Weekenders* mix album (6)
28 "*And no-one's getting___ except Mama Cass*", from The Mamas & The Papas' "Creeque Alley" (3)
29 "*Reflect in Vincent's eyes of china blue, colours changing___*", Don McLean (3)
31 "*Like the FBI, and the___*", from The Beatles' "Dig It" (1,1,1)

ANSWERS: TAKE 347

ACROSS
1 Long Time Coming, **8** Light My Fire, **9** Low, **11+19D** Art For Art's Sake, **14** Oasis, **15+23A** Yard Act, **20** New, **22+32D** Spare Ribs, **24** Toy, **27** Hut, **28** Fee, **29** Strange, **30** You, **33** Evita, **34** Ting Tings, **36** Rah, **37** Enya, **38** Essex

DOWN
1 Lullaby, **2+25D** Night Of Fear, **3** Tattoo, **4** Mayo, **5** Chills, **6+17A** Meet Me On The Corner, **7** Nolan, **10** Who Are You? **12** Ram, **13** Five, **16** Replenish, **18** Natty, **21** Warning, **26+13A** Pretty Flamingo, **31** OMG, **35** Sex

HIDDEN ANSWER
"Curtain Call"

XWORD COMPILED BY: Trevor Hungerford

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Gina Birch

The Raincoats co-founder on the records that have her shouting out loud. "I love chance, mistakes and misremembered lyrics…"

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Performance OST
WARNER BROS, 1970

When I was 15, I was really interested in hippies, and curious about what was happening from the remnants of the '60s. I'd read about hippies and Haight-Ashbury stuff in *The Observer* colour supplement and I thought it all looked like a great escape. I got the *Performance* soundtrack when it came out: I loved all the swirliness, the drugginess of some of the tracks, and then the more hardcore rock tracks. "The Hashishin" [featuring Ry Cooder and Buffy Sainte-Marie], "Performance" [with Merry Clayton and Bernard Krause] and The Last Poets tracks were favourites, but I loved them all. I only had a mono Bush record player in my room and all the tracks sounded great.

THE VELVET UNDERGROUND & NICO
The Velvet Underground & Nico
VERVE, 1967

This record was a step on for me from *Performance*: more drugs, more darkness, more New York hardcore, and I loved the drones of the viola. I loved Moe Tucker's heartbeat drumming that was her own timing, and it adds so much humanity to the record. The rigidity of so much music now is lacking that human touch – the joys and foibles of humanity. For those early live shows, there was projected light of shapes, spots and texture, the dark clothes and dark glasses they wore… The sense of danger was thrilling.

LEE 'SCRATCH' PERRY
Arkology ISLAND, 1997

I'm not much of a record collector or buyer. I never put my records in order, I just leave to fate what I pick up, what I play. I love chance mistakes and misremembered lyrics and stories. Lee Perry's lack of respect for normal studio techniques is what makes me love him, even more than I love the records he has made. Particularly when I was in my early teens, there wasn't much going on in the villages around where we were living – except when Grenville, the methodist minister, used to open up his garage for a bunch of us playing records, dancing to ska and smoking No 6 tipped cigarettes. "Curly Locks", "Girls Like Dirt", "People Funny Boy", "Soul Fire", "Blackboard Jungle Dub"…

BOB MARLEY AND THE WAILERS
Burnin' ISLAND, 1973

"*Get up, stand up/Stand up for your rights…*" I used to sing this on my art foundation as I meandered round the studio, and no-one knew what I was going on about 'til a little later. This record came to me via my brother, who was at boarding school – he came home with the record and of course it made its way to my bedroom. Bob Marley's music has been a big love of mine all through these years. I also love Nina Simone, Ivor Cutler, Lou Reed, Cat Power – some voices just kill you – The Breeders, Sonic Youth, Subway Sect, The Slits and so many more. Musically, Cecil McBee and of course Miles Davis had the free and magical spirit that is always inspiring.

ROBERT WYATT
Rock Bottom
VIRGIN, 1974

When I came to London, Epic Soundtracks from Swell Maps gave me this record. He, like me, was in touch with both a melancholia and a love of laughter. Robert Wyatt's lyrics to Alfie, his partner, are: "*Your madness fits in nicely with my own/Your lunacy fits neatly with my own*". I love this description of a relationship – it's not a common description in popular song… And I love the quality of the sound. The Mellotron is particularly enticing, along with Robert Wyatt's incredible vocal tone. Ivor Cutler is a guest on this record – both spoken word and with his harmonium – and he totally adds to the sense of absurdity, humanity and humour.

PATTI SMITH
Horses
ARISTA, 1975

I'm just listening to *Just Kids* and Patti's new book *Bread Of Angels*. A lot is talked about the way the songs on *Horses* came about – the way Tom Verlaine took Patti's writings about a dream she had about Jim Morrison and cut them up and edited them to get the lyrics for "Break It Up". So many great songs on this record – no duds! "Free Money" is a brilliant song of dreams, longing, hopefulness, generosity and passion. It truly is an exceptional record, and the instrumentation totally lights up Patti Smith's vocal delivery, which is matched in its brilliance. John Cale as producer seems to have helped to capture this in a way that is creative and exceptional.

PRINCE BUSTER
"Ten Commandments"
BLUE BEAT, 1965

"*The ten commandments of man, given to woman…*" This was perfect. A beautiful, humorous – I think! – analysis of the way many men felt about their ownership of women, so succinct. It was the perfect guidebook for any feminist… It made me laugh and it made me cry. This may be a bad choice for this article, but it is also an indication of where things were in the '70s, and how men had the upper hand in life, which can be a shock when you come out of a girls high school education where you are taken seriously for your mind and not just your body! We laughed and we experienced some bad stuff too.

PERE UBU
The Modern Dance BLANK RECORDS, 1978

The only magical mystery gig I've ever been to was Pere Ubu at Chislehurst Caves. When we boarded the coach, we didn't know where the show was going to be. It was one of the most astonishing performances I ever saw: "The Modern Dance", "Non-Alignment Pact", lots of liberties taken with the sounds, which I love. The synth became big in the '80s but Allen Ravenstine used it in a much more radical way, and the other instruments played parts to elucidate atmosphere and feelings, sometimes sounding discordant and enchanting. But it was David Thomas who was the undisputed leader of the band. His huge presence and brilliant delivery even made all the between-song chat an artform.

Gina Birch's *Trouble* is out now on Third Man. She supports the Au Pairs on tour throughout the spring, starting at Exeter Phoenix on January 30 – see *agmp.co.uk* for dates and tickets

INTERVIEW: SAM RICHARDS. PHOTOGRAPH: DEAN CHALKLEY

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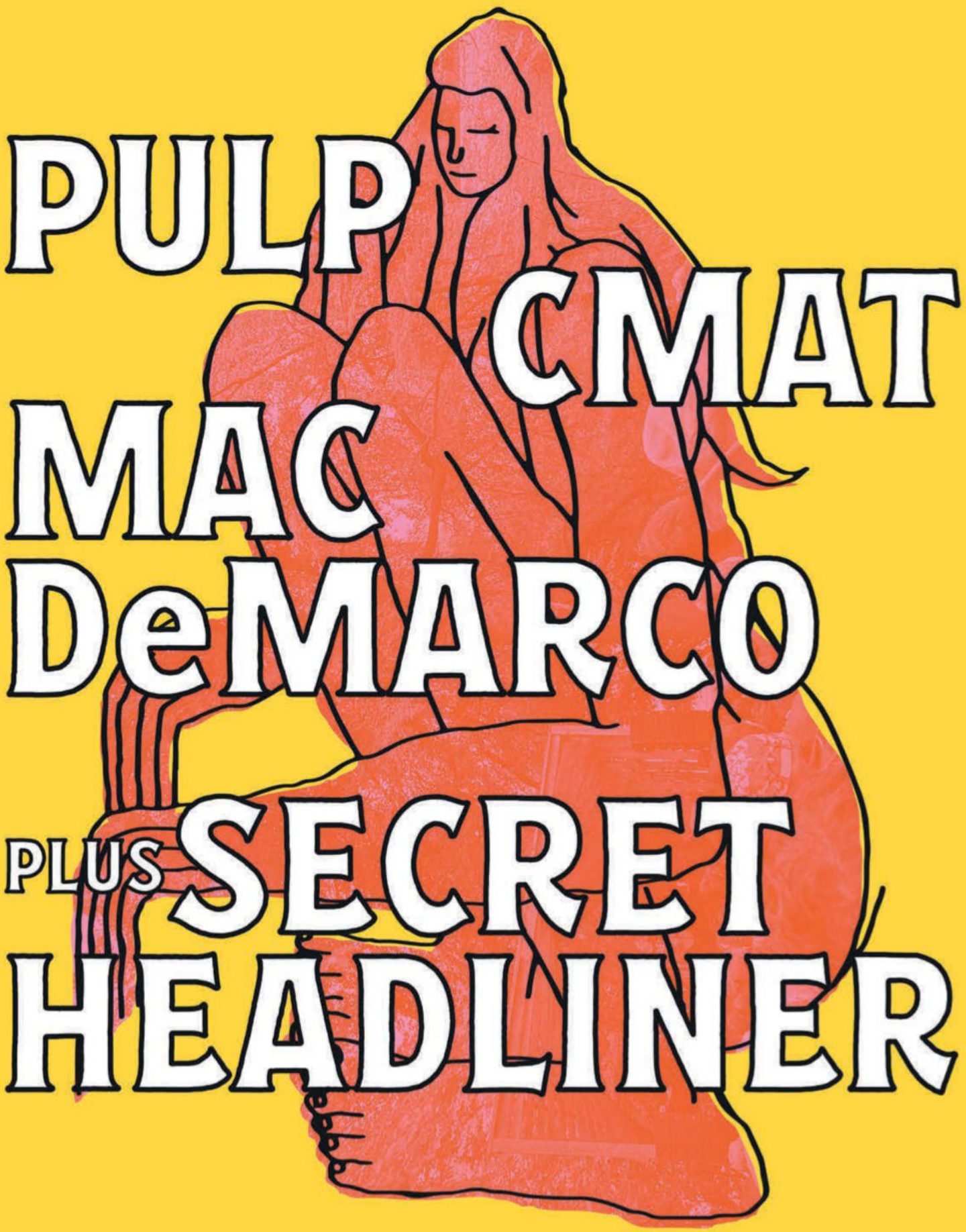

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